

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



June 2019

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON

Great Secret of Happiness III

At the same time, from this very analysis will come a note of hope, and the note of hope is: 'I have no control of the external world, but that which is in me and nearer unto me, my own world, is in my control. If the two together are required to make a failure, if the two together are necessary to give me a blow, I will not contribute the one which is in my keeping; and how then can the blow come? If I get real control of myself, the blow will never come.'

We are all the time, from childhood, trying to lay the blame upon something outside ourselves. We are always standing up to set right other people, and not ourselves. If we are miserable, we say, 'Oh, the world is a devil's world.' We curse others and say, 'What infatuated fools!' But why should we be in such a world, if we are really so good? If this is a devil's world, we must be devils also; why else should we be here? "Oh, the people of the world are so selfish!" True enough; but why should we be found in that company, if we be better? Just think of that. We only get what we deserve. It is a lie when we say the world is bad, and we are good. It can never be so. It is a terrible lie to tell ourselves. This is the first lesson to learn: be determined not to curse anything outside, not to lay the blame upon anyone outside, but be a man, stand up, lay the blame on yourself. Get hold of yourself. Is it true



that the world is to blame? Could God, who is the purest and noblest of souls, be made miserable by any of our tricks? If you are so unselfish, you are like God. What world can hurt you? But the very fact that you complain and want to lay blame upon the external world shows that you feel the external world—the very fact that you feel shows that you are not what you claim to be. You only make your offence greater by heaping misery upon misery, by imagining that the external world is hurting you, and crying out, 'Oh, this devil's world! This man hurts me; that man hurts me!' and so forth. It is adding lies to misery. We are to take care of ourselves—that much we can do—and give up attending to others for a time. Let us perfect the means; the end will take care of itself. For the world can be good and pure, only if our lives are good and pure. It is an effect, and we are the means. Therefore, let us purify ourselves. Let us make ourselves perfect.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2016), 2.7-8.



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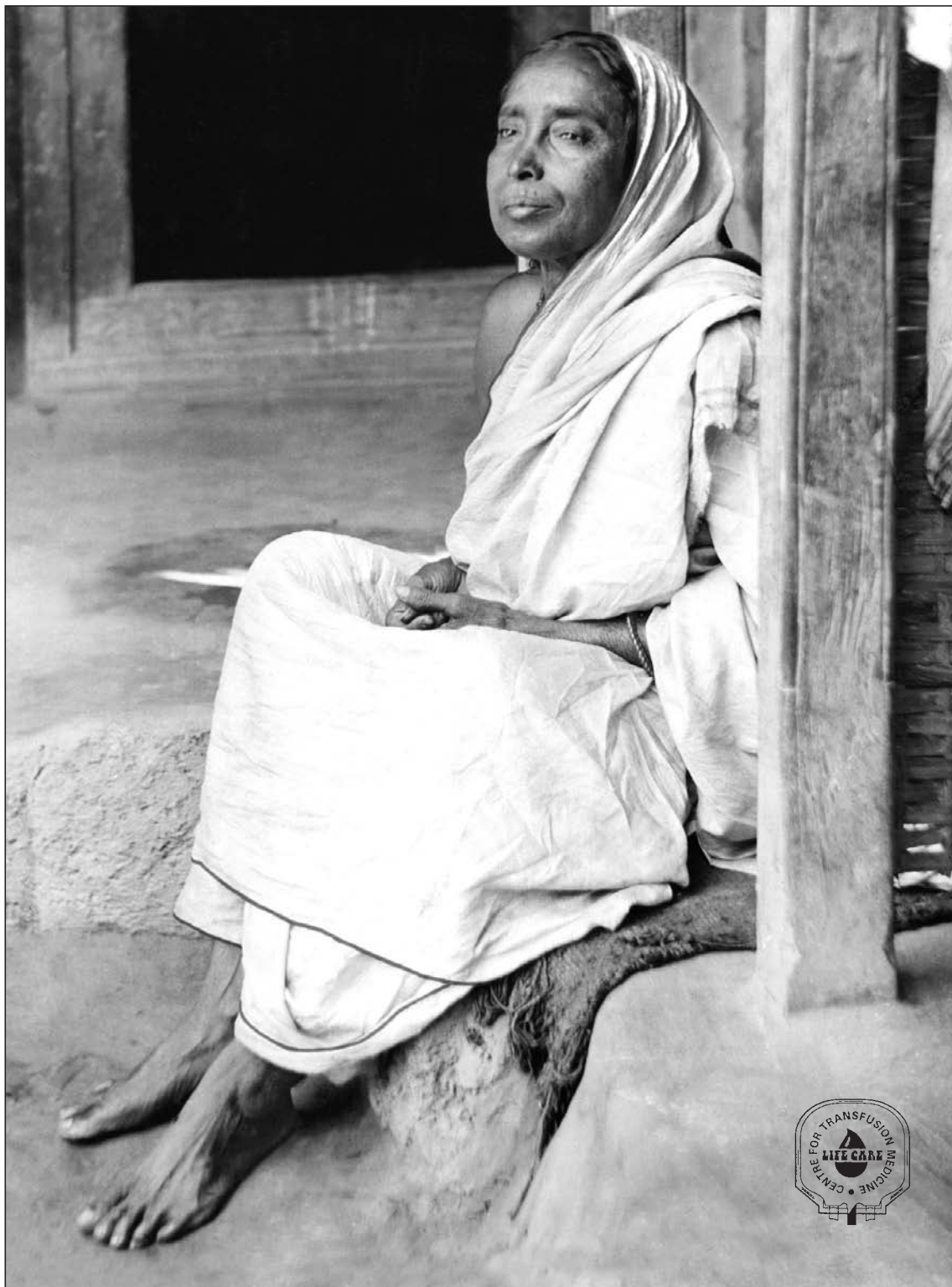
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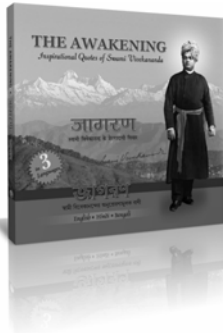


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The original quotes of Swami Vivekananda are mainly in English and have been collected from The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (9 vols. set), while the Hindi translations are quoted from Vivekananda Sahitya (10 vols. set), both published by Advaita Ashrama. The Bengali translations are from Swami Vivekanander Bani O Rachana (10 vols. set) published by Udbodhan Office, Ramakrishna Math, Baghbazar, Kolkata. Enthusiastic readers may refer to these titles for further study and understanding of Swami Vivekananda's teachings.



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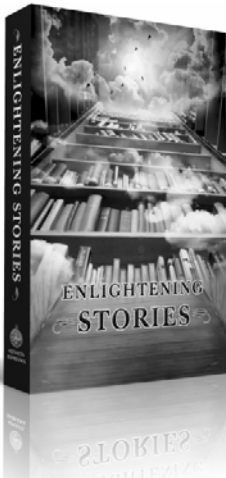
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Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

June 2019
Vol. 124, No. 6

Maitrayaniya Upanishad

मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

अथान्यत्राप्युक्तं निद्रेवान्तर्हितेन्द्रियः शुद्धितमया धिया स्वप्न इव यः पश्यतीन्द्रियबिलेऽविवशः प्रणवाख्यं प्रणेतारं
भारूपं विगतनिद्रं विजरं विमृत्युं विशोकञ्च सोऽपि प्रणवाख्यः प्रणेता भारूपो विगतनिद्रो विजरो विमृत्युर्विशोको
भवतीत्येवं ह्याह ।

एवं प्राणमथोङ्कारं यस्मात् सर्वमनेकधा ।

युनक्ति युञ्जते वापि तस्माद्योग इति स्मृतः ॥

एकत्वं प्राणमनसोरिन्द्रियाणां तथैव च ।

सर्वभावपरित्यागी योग इत्यभिधीयते ॥

॥ ६.२५ ॥

*Athany-atrapy-uktam nidreva-antar-hitendriyah shuddhitamaya dhiya swapna iva yah pashyati-
indriya-bile'vivashah pranava-akhyam pranetaram bha-rupam vigata-nidram vijaram vimrityum
vishokam cha so'pi pranava-akhyam praneta bha-rupah vigata-nidrah vijarah vimrityur vishoko
bhavati-ity-evam hy-aha.*

Dhyanamantah pare tattve lakshyeshu cha nidhiyate.

Ato'vishesha-vijnanam vishesham upagachchhati.

Manase cha viline tu yat sukham chatma-sakshikam.

Tad-brahma chamritam shukram sa gatiir-loka eva sah.

(6.25)

And thus it has been said elsewhere: 'He who has one's senses indrawn as in sleep, who has one's thoughts perfectly pure as in dream, who, while in the cavity of the senses, is not under their control, perceives the one called *pranava*, the leader, of the form of light, the sleepless, free from old age, the deathless, the sorrowless, oneself becomes *pranava* and becomes a leader, of the form of light, sleepless, free from old age, deathless, and sorrowless.' And thus it has been said: 'Because in one's manner one joins the breath, the syllable Om and all this world in its manifoldness or perhaps they are joined, therefore this is called yoga. The oneness of the breath, the mind, and likewise of the senses and the abandonment of all conditions of existence, is designated as yoga.'

(6.25)

THIS MONTH

WHERE ARE WE travelling to? What is our destination? How do we get there? Are there any detours? All these questions are answered and discussed in **The Ride We Seldom Take**.

I S Madugula, a retired English teacher from Austin, Texas and Sudha Emany, an English teacher at the Vivekananda Institute of Languages, Ramakrishna Math, explore the poetic, spiritual, and philosophical greatness of Acharya Shankara's *Shivanandalahari* in an attempt to reconcile the apparent paradox of the prophet of Advaita Vedanta composing hymns filled with the beauty and fervour of the heights of devotion in **Acharya Shankara's *Shivanandalahari*: The Saint as Devotee**.

Existentialism is a philosophical movement, which became popular primarily in the twentieth century although it began earlier when the writings of Soren Kierkegaard (1813–55) were published. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) also is considered to be a precursor of the movement. In the twentieth century, existentialism was mainly identified with Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80). Arun Chatterjee, Emeritus professor at the University of Tennessee, explains Existentialism in **Existentialism: An Overview**.

Shonaleeka Kaul, associate professor at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, scrutinises the modern reinvention of the iconic *Rajatarangini*, the sprawling, twelfth-century, versified account in Sanskrit of the kings of Kashmir from the earliest to the poet, Kalhana's, own time in **Bridging**

Gaps, Creating Divides—Sanskrit Classics, Europe, and the Nineteenth-Century Politics of Translation.

The young have wonderful insights on various issues. In *Young Eyes*, such insights are brought to the readers every month. This month, Atmaja Basu, a school student of grade three from Sutton Park School, Dublin, Ireland, shares her thoughts on **What Should Schools Have?**

Many wonderful nuggets of wisdom contained in ancient scriptures are difficult to understand. In *Balabodha*, such ancient wisdom is made easy. This month's topic is **Samskriti**. Understanding this popular word is necessary to understand its meaning.

Egos destroy great undertakings. Pride can lead to great falls. Prayers can bring miracles. This is shown in the second instalment of the story **Sri Rama and Sri Krishna**. This story is this month's *Traditional Tales* and has been translated from the Tamil book *Anmika Kathaigal*.

Akeel Bilgrami, the Sidney Morgenbesser professor of philosophy, professor on the Committee on Global Thought at Columbia University, and author of *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment; Self-Knowledge and Resentment; and Belief and Meaning*; and Jonathan R Cole, John Mitchell Mason professor of the university at Columbia University and author of *The Great American University: Its Rise to Preeminence, Its Indispensable National Role, Why It Must Be Protected* have edited the book **Who's Afraid of Academic Freedom?** From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.

The Ride We Seldom Take

THE HUMAN LIFE IS full of journeys. The entire life itself is a big journey that has many small and long journeys interspersed within it. We have many destinations, one leads to the other. Some destinations become the starting points to newer destinations. We take many journeys, we miss some, and forget to take some others. Not all journeys are physical, most are mental journeys. Not all journeys involve travel or space or time. Some journeys are apparently tedious, others apparently easier. Thus, if there is something that the human being cannot escape in life, it is journeying. We shift from centre to centre, from periphery to periphery; we revolve around the axis of life, on the base of the substratum that is the Divine.

The grossest form of a human journey is that of travelling from one place to another. This journey is done by human beings on foot, by animal-driven transport, bicycle, motored transport, train, boat, ship, or an aeroplane. Science fiction shows us the possibility of teleportation, travel between two locations without actually travelling the distance. One would just disappear in one location and then reappear at the destination. While teleportation could become a reality some decades from now, as of now, that is not a possible option for travelling.

Technology has eased the human life as much as it has complicated it. Travel is no exception. Now, we have been excused from waiting in line for public transport or from crying hoarse on the road to hail a taxi only to be given a cold shoulder by these ubiquitous public carriers. One does

not need to look for such cabs any more, not at least in the major cities of the world. We are now gifted with numerous mobile application-

This ride tops all rides because it takes one to a blissful state.

or app-driven taxi services like Uber, Lyft, Ola, Gett, and Easy Taxi.

These apps are quite easy to operate. One has to open the app and automatically the app finds one's location. From there, one can input the place one wants to go to. Then the app shows the various options of rides available, like carpooling or car sharing, small cars, bigger cars, luxury vehicles, and so on. One has to select the vehicle of one's preference and then one is shown the exact locations of different vehicles that are moving near one's location. So, one can see the many cars that are moving around one's place and the exact locations of these cars. You can see the direction towards which a particular car is moving. Then, the request for a vehicle is communicated by a central server to the nearby vehicles, and when a driver selects that ride, one is informed about the driver's name, the licence plate of the vehicle, the driver's rating, and the expected arrival of the vehicle to one's location.

At this stage, one can call the driver and confirm the route to one's location, or ask for some other details. Usually, the driver calls the user or the prospective passenger. One can see the vehicle moving and coming towards one's location. If one sees that the vehicle is going in

a wrong direction, one can call the driver and give directions so that the driver comes to one's location. Then, one gets in the vehicle, confirms that one is the passenger by telling one's name or by sharing a code, and then leaves for the destination.

While on board the car, one might add some stops on the way to the destination. One can stop at these interim stops, do whatever one has to do there, and resume one's journey to the final destination. One might also order food or other stuff to be delivered to the car and eat or have the other stuff while travelling to the destination.

These cab apps mirror the journeys of our lives. However, here we will see how they resemble the human journey of unravelling one's true nature, the spiritual journey. The taxi apps resemble the numerous religious and scriptural texts that are available in various faith traditions that help one to identify one's location in the spiritual journey, the exact level of spiritual understanding that one is already in. They also give us numerous alternatives to choose from as our destinations. Different spiritual aspirants might want different spiritual accomplishments and while some might opt for the highest spiritual enlightenment, the kind of enlightenment perceived as the highest might vary.

Once a spiritual aspirant has decided after contemplation and analysis, one's location or level of spiritual understanding, and has selected the type of spiritual accomplishment one wants, then there remains the choice of the path to be made. One could opt for an easier path that requires comparatively less effort or one could opt for a more difficult path, or select a path that can be tread only by the rarest of rare. Once the spiritual aspirant has done contemplation and has decided the destination and the path to be taken in one's spiritual life, God, much like the central

server of the taxi app, directs different spiritual teachers and when one of those teachers opts to teach the spiritual aspirant, the teacher is connected to the spiritual aspirant.

Upon meeting with the guru, the spiritual aspirant has to identify oneself as being eligible for the path by fulfilling the prerequisites or eligibility criteria for the spiritual practices. Once the spiritual aspirant starts one's journey of spiritual practices, one might opt for studies or service or fall for some indulgences of the body and the senses. They come as detours from the path to destination. Sometimes the spiritual aspirant might need some additional knowledge regarding the spiritual discipline much like an order for food placed on the taxi app. That knowledge, it could even be some occult power, is delivered to the spiritual aspirant, who is on one's journey to the desired spiritual accomplishment. This ride finally ends with the spiritual aspirant being guided by the guru to the destination.

This is the journey of all human journeys. It lends meaning to all the other meaningless and inconsequential journeys that we undertake. This is the ride we seldom take. Life gets its purpose from this journey. When a person takes this ride, then that person is on one's way towards freedom from suffering and bondage. This ride tops all rides because it takes one to a blissful state. All the scriptures of the religious world talk about this journey from the mundane to profound, from the apparent to the real, from the bound to the free, from the conditioned to the unconditioned, from the divisible to the indivisible, from the inert to the conscious, from the individual to the immanent, from the mortal to the immortal, from the sorrowful to the blissful, and from the unknown to the known. This is the only journey worth taking. Will you take it?



Acharya Shankara's Shivanandalahari —The Saint as Devotee

IS Madugula and Sudha Emany

The Irony

THERE IS A CERTAIN ineluctable irony in a realised saint performing rituals or offering prayers to a personified deity, in one who logically establishes that the Supreme is One without a second fervently worshipping the many, and in a *jnani* seamlessly playing the role of an ardent bhakta.

According to Avadhuta Dattatreya, the saint needs no yoga, no meditation, no austerity—because such a person has transcended every type of spiritual practice and dwells in the realm of the Supreme.¹ ‘It appears to me that my innate self and the Supreme Self are truly identical and exactly like one continuous space. How can there be a meditator and meditation?’ (1.39, 20). ‘The object, either with form or without form, is always negated by saying “Not this, not this”. Only the supreme Beatitude, which is free from difference and sameness, exists’ (1.62, 29).

In his response to Gaudapada's question ‘who are you?’² Acharya Shankara outlines the same philosophical position:

I am not the earth, water, sky, fire, air, or an aggregate of these elements nor do I share any of their properties. I am verily Śiva, the unified consciousness, the One that is pure and absolute. I am beyond caste and its regimen, beyond yoga and its practices; I am the one and only awareness that we all experience in dreamless sleep. I cannot be identified with a father or a mother, gods, worlds, or the Vedas, sacrifices or shrines. I am neither void nor nonexistence. I am the one

and only Śiva, the Absolute ... I have nothing to do with the philosophical systems of Sāṃkhya, Śaiva, Jaina, Pāñcharātraṃ, or Mīmāṃsā. ... You cannot say that I am above or below, inside or outside; neither am I the middle or the sides, east or west. Because of my all-pervasiveness, I am the indivisible and auspicious Śiva (ibid.).

Note however that both the Avadhuta and Patanjali refer to *ishvara*, the active aspect of the actionless Brahman, as necessary to dispense grace to those who seek it. The former begins his work with the word *ishvara*: ‘*Ishvaranugrahadeva pumsam advaita vasana*; people get interested in Advaita only by God's grace.’³ Then he switches immediately to Atman in the second verse without batting an eyelid.

The author of the *Yoga Sutra* says that cognitive trance, *samprajnata* samadhi, can be attained through contemplation of or prayer to *ishvara*: ‘*Ishvara pranidhanad va*.’⁴ He again says: ‘*Samadhi siddhir ishvara pranidhanat*; discussing the attainment of supernatural powers’ (2.45).

Shivanandalahari: General Considerations

The *jnani*-bhakta dichotomy is all the more striking when that *jnani* happens to be none other than the hymnodist Acharya Shankara, the author of *Shivanandalahari* and *Saundaryalahari* among scores of other poems of praise. He appears to be an equal-opportunity extoller of every god and goddess he could think of, not wanting to slight any of the Almighty's manifestations.

While *Shivanandalahari* is a straightforward devotional offering to Shiva in *stotra* form, the heavy-duty and technically intricate adoration of Shiva-Shakti presented in *Saundaryalahari* requires, on the part of the reader, a high level of acquaintance with the tantric traditions of the time. That poem deals with a 'specialised' bhakti, unlike the author's other 'generic' hymns.

In *Shivanandalahari*,⁵ Acharya Shankara uses both 'literary' and 'folk' meters, and *gana* and *matra* prosodic forms. Thus, in addition to mainstream meters like *shardula* and *shikharini*, he employs many 'niche' meters like *vaitaliya*, *vijogini*, and others that we also encounter in the folk verses of *Bhajagovindam* or *Mohamudgara*. He took full advantage of the wealth of not only Sanskrit diction and rhetoric but also its metrics.

This brief note about Acharya Shankara's use of meters is included with a view to pointing out that prosody, at least in Sanskrit, is an aid to the expression of bhava or sentiment, and is varied according to context and the idea that is being conveyed. Thus, changing moods and modes of presentation of ideas require metrical variations.

The literary excellence of *Shivanandalahari* will be self-evident when we compare it with the other popular Shiva hymn, *Shivamahimna Stotram*, the hymn to Shiva's illustriousness by the demi-god Pushpadanta, a much shorter poem that is said to have sent Sri Ramakrishna into raptures. That poem is an unabashed, straightforward praise of Shiva as the supreme Lord, without much rhetorical apparatus worth noting. Only the mainstream meters of *shikharini*, *malini*, *vasanta tilaka*, and *anushtubh* are used. No embellishments, no tropes, no figures, and hardly any sound effects, but its intensity of devotion and simple elegance guarantee its place in bhakti literature.⁶ Here is a verse from this poet offering his creation to the Lord:

*asura sura munindrair architasyendumauleh
grathita guna mahimno nirgunasyeshvarasya
sakala gana varishthah pushpadanta abhidhanah
ruchiram alaghu vrittaih stotram etat chakara*

The best of Gandharvas called Pushpadanta has composed this beautiful hymn in charming verse to the Lord, who is worshipped by asuras, gods, and the best of sages, whose praises have been sung, who has the moon on his forehead, and who is attributeless.⁷

*sarvalankara yuktam sarala pada yutam sadhu
vritam suvarnam*

*sadbhish samstuyamanam sarasaguna yutam lak-
shitam lakshanadhyam*

*udyad bhusha vishesham upagata vinayam dyota-
mana artha rekham*

*kalyanim deva gauripriya mama kavita kan-
yakam tvam grihana*

O lord, darling of Gauri, please accept my poetic daughter, who possesses all decorations, has a straight gait, is of good conduct, has a beautiful complexion, is praised by the wise, has charming qualities, is distinguished, abounds in excellences, is characterised by superior ornaments, has decorum, has a brilliant line denoting wealth in her palm, and is auspicious.⁸

It appears that the Gandharva poet is no match for the human saint Acharya Shankara, when it comes to the expression of creativity and variety of sentiments.

Shivanandalahari: Specifics

We will now analyse the different strands within the mainstream bhakti as portrayed in the century of verses contained in *Shivanandalahari* by its saintly author playing the role of a devotee. It soon becomes apparent that bhakti is at the head of the trail that a true devotee blazes all the way to jnana.

The saint and the devotee necessarily have different starting points. The saint is aware of

one's identity with the Supreme and asks for the strengthening of one's convictions. The saint and the deity are one and the same. The devotee looks for a deity separate from oneself, who can grant wishes, whom one can worship, touch, feel, and talk to.⁹ Some qualities of a saint and a devotee are given in the table below.¹⁰

These 'disparate' characteristics of the saint and the devotee are not as cut-and-dried as they might sound at first; there are cross-over situations where each wants the benefit of the other's approach. In one of his compositions, the saint-musician Tyagaraja, for instance, petitions Sri Ramachandra to grant him knowledge so he would be a 'better' bhakta:

*jnanamosagarada garuda gamana nato vada
ni namamuche namadi nirmala mainadi
paramatmudu jivatmudu padinalugu lokamulu
nara kinnara kimpurushulu naradadi munulu
paripurna nishkalanka niravadhi sukhadayaka
vara tyagarajarchita varamu tanane*

Would you kindly impart
true knowledge to me

My mind is purified
by the repetition of your name—

The knowledge that the individual self and
the Supreme Self,

the fourteen worlds, the celestials, and
sages like Narada

are all you, perfect and whole,
the source of endless joy.¹¹

Then there are ardent devotees such as Jayadeva, Kabir, Namdev, Chaitanya, and Tulasidas, who are nothing short of knowers of God by any standard.

For Acharya Shankara, the saint, bhakti towards Shiva is the goal per se in the present context. So the entire hymn of *Shivanandalahari* is the celebration of the tidal wave of bliss that is Shiva. That bhakti is pure, direct, and simple, whereas the majority of devotees display what may be called 'applied' bhakti, that is, bhakti in various guises and for multiple purposes.

<i>Saint</i>	<i>Devotee</i>
Is characterised by detachment.	Is required to develop attachment to one's chosen deity.
Is convinced that the Lord is within oneself.	Looks upon the Lord as a separate entity.
The Lord has no name or form, <i>nirguna</i> .	The Lord has many names and forms, <i>saguna</i> . We may call the Lord by any name.
Liberation is seeing God in one's heart and everywhere else.	Liberation is being forever in God's presence, worshipping, praising, feeling, touching, and serving God.
Prays for steadfastness of devotion, unwavering mind, release from maya and samsara.	Also prays for steadfast devotion, unfaltering dedication, and eventual permanent stay in the Lord's abode.
Sets an example for others to follow, though oneself has transcended the stage of rituals and prayers.	Engages in ritual worship and prayer for oneself as well as others to obtain the Lord's grace.
Renounces the world including one's baggage from previous lives.	Sacrifices comforts and possessions.

The same observation is true also of his other *lahari*, bliss, the esoteric hymn *Saundaryalahari*, excluding the first forty-one verses that are of a tantric nature. It describes in ecstatic diction the beauty of Shakti in association with Shiva, the ascetic, who by himself is unable even to stir, let alone manage the business of creation.¹² Acharya Shankara is perhaps telling us that the active and inactive principles of the Absolute are both equally important for created beings, offering them a choice of approach.

It is in *Shivanandalahari* that we come across the best definition of bhakti outside of the sutra literature: 'That state of mind is called bhakti or divine love wherein all movements of thought go automatically to the lotus feet of the Lord and stick to them forever just as the seed of Ankola tree falls and gravitates to the parent tree, the iron needle to the magnetic stone, the devoted wife to her husband, the creeper to the tree, and the river to the ocean.'¹³

Acharya Shankara praises the humble bhakta, whose identification with the Lord is no less complete than that of the *jnani*. In verse sixty-three, for instance, he praises the hunter who offers his own eyes to replace the damaged ones of the Shiva idol in the forest, who performs his *abhisheka*, bath, with gargled water, and offers left-over meat as *naivedya*, offering. Before he gouges out his own eyes, the hunter marks the spot on the idol with his foot with a worn-out sandal. Acharya Shankara asks rhetorically what bhakti wouldn't do when it ripens in the hearts of the lowliest of devotees: '*Bhaktih kim na karoty aho vanacharo bhaktavatamsayate*'.

Acharya Shankara also indirectly praises the beneficial effects of bhakti, regardless of the physical incarnational limitations of the individual. In the tenth verse he says:

Let me (if need be) be born as man or celestial,
as wild beast or mosquito, as animal or worm,

as bird or any creature. What harm can accrue from these embodiments, if in every such birth my heart always feels inclined to disport in the waves of supreme bliss consisting in the constant remembrance of Thy lotus feet?¹⁴

And, while at it, he is not willing to settle for ordinary gods whose worship produces trivial results; he wants only Shiva to dwell in his heart:

In this world, many are the minor deities who bestow paltry rewards. I do not, even in dream, attach any importance either to them or to their worship or to the results accruing from it. O Lord, O Thou bestower of happiness and the embodiment of all goodness! For long have I been praying for Thy lotus feet, which are difficult of attainment even for divinities like Viṣṇu and Brahmā who live in close proximity to Thee (4).

In clear support of bhakti, Acharya Shankara even recommends the rituals of worship in verse ninety-four:

The tongue that speaks of Siva's stories is the real tongue; the eyes that see His image, the real eyes; the hands that always worship Him, the real hands; and he who ever remembers Him, the attainer of the true end of life (82).

It's rewarding to note that in his own personality, Sri Ramakrishna seamlessly combines the two paths of bhakti and jnana, and is thus uniquely qualified to clarify the bhakti-jnana polarity:

He [God] is formless, and again He has forms. For the bhakta He assumes forms. But He is formless for the jnani, that is, for him who looks on the world as a mere dream. The bhakta feels that he is one entity and the world another. Therefore, God reveals Himself to him as a Person. But the jnani ... always reasons, applying the process of 'Not this, not this'. Through this discrimination he realizes, by his inner perception, that the ego and the universe are both illusory, like a dream. Then the jnani realizes Brahman in his own consciousness. ...

God now and then assumes various forms for His lovers and reveals Himself to them as a Person. But with the rising of the sun of Knowledge. ... one doesn't feel any more that God is a Person, nor does one see God's forms. What He is cannot be described. Who will describe Him? He who would do so disappears. He cannot find his 'I' any more. ... a bhakta believes that God has attributes and reveals Himself to men as a Person, assuming forms. It is He who listens to our prayers. ... It doesn't matter whether you accept God with form or not. It is enough to feel that God is a Person who listens to our prayers, who creates, preserves, and destroys the universe, and who is endowed with infinite power.¹⁵

Let's see below how we can classify the one hundred verses of *Shivanandalahari* in terms of their principal bhakti themes:

- a. Simple praise, prostrations, bhakti: 1, 17, 21, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50.
- b. Shiva as bliss: 2, 24, 29, 38.
- c. Shiva as Consciousness: 3.
- d. Shiva is superior to Brahma, Vishnu: 4, 15, 18, 23.
- e. Devotee as *pashu*, animal, in need of succour: 5, 13, 16, 22.
- f. Learning is fruitless: 6.
- g. Total focus on Shiva: 7.
- h. Inferiority of other deities: 8.
- i. Surrender of heart: 9, 10, 11, 12, 14.
- j. Reproach: 19.
- k. Simian mind: 20, 22, 43.
- l. Begging for vision: 25, 26.
- m. Bhakti defined: 49.

A good quarter of the hymnal—twenty-five verses out of the one hundred—deals with the topic of bhakti that is straightforward praise for the Lord from a supplicant devotee, who completely surrenders to Lord. It is interesting to note, however, that there are shades of difference in the

expression of the saint's devotion from one verse to the next. This quarter century of verses listed under (a) above seems to characterise the full stream of devotion flowing from the devotee's heart towards its inevitable confluence with the ocean of divine bliss, the *ananda lahari* that is Shiva.

The saint as devotee then displays a unique set of attributes not shared by ordinary devotees. Thus, in (a), the main theme of bhakti can be broken down into its sub-genres with the relevant verse numbers within brackets. The saint

1. Offers his salutations to Shiva and his consort, meditating on whom leads to the experience of bliss—*ananda anubhava* (1).
2. Is disappointed that one cannot see Shiva's feet to bow to, because of the long line of the gods ahead of oneself with their dazzling diadems prostrating themselves at Shiva's feet (17).
3. Invites Shiva and his consort into the 'tent' of one's mind pitched along the highway of meditation (21).
4. Wonders what one can offer to the Lord who already possesses everything of value (27).
5. Feels happy that one has already attained the four desirable goals of a bhakta, namely *sarupya*, *samipya*, *salokya*, and *sayujya* here and now, respectively through worship, praising, keeping company with devotees, and contemplation on the Lord (28).
6. Feels frustrated for not being able to serve the Lord enough because of human limitations (31) and praises Shiva's great act of mercy of disposing of the terrible venom *kalakuta* by trapping it in his throat to save humankind from instant annihilation (32).
7. Claims there is no need to worship unreliable deities, because it is enough if one bows to Shiva once (33); and extols his intrepidity as he stands alone at the time of *pralaya* (34).

8. Believes there is no need even to entreat Shiva, who knows everything and is ready to grant the wishes of the devotees unasked (35).
9. Wants to perform the purificatory rite using the body and mind as the required tools of worship (36).
10. Wants to use the mind as the churning rod and one's devotion as the rope to churn the wisdom of the scriptures, in order to gain moksha (37).
11. Believes that if Shiva resides in one's heart, one would be blissful (39); if the rice paddy of one's heart is irrigated by the pure waters of the Lord's noble deeds, it would yield a bumper crop (40); suggests that each of one's limbs has its designated purpose of serving the Lord (41); requests the Lord to occupy the *durga*, fortress, of one's virtuous mind (42); prays that one dwell in the dense forest of one's mind destroying its many evil qualities (43); if one settles down in the 'cave' of one's heart like a lion, then one would be unafraid of anything (44); urges the noble bird of one's mind to seek the welcoming nest of the Lord's feet (45–6); and compares contemplation on the Lord to the spring when virtue blossoms (47–9).

Nuances of Jnana

It is legend that Acharya Shankara famously made the declaration that he could distil the essence of a thousand Vedanta texts in just a half-verse: '*Shlokardhena pravakshyami yaduktam grantha kotibhih, brahma satyam, jagan mithya, jivo brahmaiva naparah*'; I tell in half a verse what has been told in million books; Brahman is real; the world is an illusion; the individual soul is none other than Brahman.'

The 'real' Shankara, that is, Acharya Shankara

as a realised being and teacher of Advaita comes through in a diminutive *stotra* of just three verses attributed to him, *Pratassmarana Stotra*. The very first of three verses gives us the essence of the saintly approach to the Godhead:

Pratas-smarami bridhi samsphurad atma tattvam, sachchit sukham paramahamsa gatim turiyam, yas-svapna jagara sushuptam avaiti nityam tad brahma nishkalamaham na cha bhuta sanghab; as the day breaks, I meditate in my heart on the effulgent principle of the Atman that is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, sought after by the Self-realised ascetics and described as the fourth state that is ever aware of the waking, dreaming, sleeping states, that partless Brahman that I am, not being an aggregate of the elements.¹⁶

The other two verses are equally abstruse where Acharya Shankara seeks refuge in the One beyond mind and speech, who is only negatively characterised as *neti neti*, not this, not this, in the scriptures, the unborn and imperishable, the ancient one beyond the darkness, *avidya*, and the One who is behind the maya that creates the rope-serpent delusion.

All three verses start with *pratah* followed by verbs of worship *smarami*, *bhajami*, and *namami*, but all of them are used in the sense of contemplation and not any ritual. It is interesting to speculate that, in order to understand the saint's devotion, all we have to do is to substitute Atman or Brahman for the names of the deities addressed in the *stotras* and, taken together, they constitute a comprehensive treatise on Advaita philosophy!

Embedded in the dozens of his *stotras*, *ashtakas*, *prayatas*, and *stutis* are direct petitions to the deities to reinforce Acharya Shankara's bhakti itself, though the majority of them simply hymn their glory. While *Kanakadharastotram* is perhaps the single exception where Acharya Shankara asks the goddess to bestow wealth on a desperately needy family, most of his *stotras*

request the deity with form to make him a better bhakta, such as in the *Lakshminrisimha Karavalamba Stotram*, *Bhavani Bhujangam*, *Manikarnikashtakam*, and *Haristutih*.

Then we have *stotras* of his that beg for nothing but pure jnana. In his *Nirguna Manasapuja*, the formless Brahman is invoked. The enlightened devotee asks rhetorically: 'How can I worship that changeless Bliss, the One without a second?' in the opening verse: '*Akhande sachchidanande nirvikalpaika rupini, sthite-advitiya bhava-api katham puja vidhiyate?*' The second last verse explains how to conduct a puja ritual: '*Evam vedanta kalpokta svatmalinga prapujanam, kurvann-amaranam vapi kshanam va susamahitah*'; thus the worship of the indwelling image of the Lord is to be performed lifelong.'

Again in the well-known poem *Yati or Kaupina Panchakam*, Acharya Shankara asserts the happiness of the ascetic: '*Vedanta vakyeshu sada ramanto bhikshanna matrena cha tushtimantah, vishokam antahkarane charantah kaupinavantah khalu bhagyavantah*'; the ascetic wearing a loin cloth is happily absorbed in the contemplation of the Vedic teachings, being satisfied with the alms that one begs, without a care in one's heart.'

Acharya Shankara composed the *Yogataravali* as an antidote to the poison of samsara, *samsara halahala moha shantyai*, and states that the evil tendencies of the mind do not affect one who is its master, *matikrita guna doshah mam vibhum na sprishanti*.

Thus uniquely in *Shivanandalahari*, Acharya Shankara weaves into a single strand both jnana and bhakti components in a sustained manner, in a way synthesising the core notions of all the other hymns in a literary artefact. It is as though, not being satisfied with the piecemeal descriptions of the Lord as both a *saguna* and *nirguna* entity in his *stotras*, he wanted to offer an

unfragmented depiction of Shiva that embodies all aspects of Shiva's glory in one place. In the space of a hundred verses, Acharya Shankara praises, argues, and pleads with, petitions, engages in friendly banter with, and surrenders himself to the Lord.

It is important to keep in mind the critical fact that Consciousness is unitary and is never fragmented.¹⁷ It is the same power that makes the saint and the sinner, the devotee and degenerate, and the realised and the reincarnated live, though the second entities in these pairs don't know it.

Nuances of Bhakti

For Narada, bhakti is supreme love for God, *sa tu-asmin parama-premarupa*.¹⁸ For Shandilya, it is extreme longing for him, *sa paranuraktir ishware*.¹⁹ So far so good. But, just as the Avadhuta is uncompromising in his defence of Advaita, sage Shandilya of Upanishadic fame is adamant about the superiority of bhakti to both jnana and karma. He would be called a radical today. His thesis is beautifully explained by Swami Harshananda in a *Vedanta Kesari* article. The excerpt is worth quoting here.

He [Shandilya] ... controverts the theory that knowledge alone can give liberation, propounds and defends devotion as the sole means of liberation and also delineates the various forms of devotion. Narada however does not seem to be interested a whit in all these intellectual gymnastics but goes straight to the practical aspects. ...

The individual soul or Jiva is of the nature of consciousness and is essentially identical with God, also called Brahman ... His individuality, his separation from God, has been caused by his association with buddhi or antahkarana (intellect or internal organ) which consists of the three gunas and is an upadhi (a limiting adjunct). Again, *this association and the consequent bondage of samsara have been caused*

by lack of devotion to God and not by lack of knowledge of Him. ... this upadhi is also real and not an illusion caused by ignorance. Hence it cannot be removed by knowledge. ... This can be done only by supreme devotion to God. Once this is done, liberation is attained.

Supreme devotion which rises in the final stages of secondary devotion²⁰ as a result of the practice of secondary devotion leads to infinite beatitude ... This devotion can be directed not only towards God but also towards any of His manifestations ...

It is the lack of this supreme devotion that is the real cause of bondage, of suffering and transmigration, and not lack of knowledge.²¹

In his introduction to *The Bhagavadgita*, Radhakrishnan explains the role of the personal God in people's lives:

Bhakti or devotion is a relationship of trust and love to a personal God. Worship of the unmanifested (*avyaktopāsanā*) is difficult for ordinary human beings, though there are instances of great advaitins (non-dualists) who have given to the Impersonal Reality a warm emotional content. Worship of the personal God is recommended as the easier way open to all, the weak and the lowly, the illiterate and the ignorant ...

The origin of the way of devotion is hidden in the mists of long ago ... The Supreme is not a God who sleeps in serene abstraction while hearts heavy laden cry out for help, but a saving God of love believed and experienced as such by the devotee. He bestows salvation on those who believe in Him.²²

Towards the end of the *Bhakti Sutras*, Narada states how bhakti is bound to pave the way for realisation:

Sarvada sarva bhavena nishchintitaih bhagavaneva bhajanayah; the devotee, being free from all cares and worries, should always worship the Lord alone.²³

Sa kirtyamanah shighramevavirbhavaty

anubhavayati (cha) bhaktan; having been glorified thus, the Lord manifests himself very soon and blesses the devotees with realisation (30;188).

Devotion to the eternal Truth alone is the greatest (190-2).²⁴

The saint starts with the conviction that the Lord is within oneself but would like to place Lord on a pedestal just to enjoy the temporary experience of duality, before one and the Lord merge again. The saint is then setting an example for the rest of us non-saints to become bhaktas.

But the fact remains that the bhakta holds the Lord firmly within one's heart exclusively and surrenders to Lord forgetting one's personhood. One loses one's individuality and one's existence, by letting one's devotion consume him totally. The duality vanishes when devotion ripens. There is nothing but the supreme Soul, above and below, in and out.

The most profound prayer that the saint can offer to the supreme Being is perhaps the very first invocatory verse that occurs in Acharya Shankara's *Dakshinamurti Stotra*: '*Maunam vyakhya prakatita parabrahma tattvam ... chinmudram anandamurtim, svatmaramam mudita vadanam*'; I pray to the youthful teacher expounding the ultimate Reality, with one hand displaying the sign of pure Awareness, who is the embodiment of Bliss, and whose joyous countenance radiates his inner peace.²⁵

He can meditate on Shiva only in the most abstract terms:

Him do I worship, the Paramatman, One and without a second,

Who is the Cause of the universe.²⁶

The Primal Being, the Spirit formless and actionless, who is attained through the syllable Om:

Him do I worship—Śiva, of whom the universe is born,

by whom it is sustained, in whom it merges (ibid.).

Therefore, whether the saint who knows he is non-different from Paramatman nevertheless prays for God's grace, or the devotee who looks upon Paramatman as an entity other than oneself melds one's individuality with God through intense devotion, they both have the same goal *and the same experience of oneness with the Divine*. The devotee's deity and the saint's Brahman are the same. In both cases, the process involved is the annihilation of individuality and the obliteration of the ego. Any variance in their approaches to the Godhead is merely a distinction without a difference.

Swami Vivekananda says it in his inimitable style:

All this conflict is in the preliminary (preparatory) stages of Jnana and Bhakti. ... there is no difference between the supreme Bhakti and the supreme Jnana. The supreme Bhakti is to realise God as the form of Prema (love) itself. If you see the loving form of God manifested everywhere and in everything, how can you hate or injure others? ... In the perfect realization of love, even the consciousness of one's own body does not exist. Also, the supreme Jnana is to realise the oneness everywhere, to see one's own self as the Self in everything. That too cannot come so long as there is the least consciousness of the ego (Aham).²⁷

He continues:

But which do you think is the higher—the end or the means? Surely, the means can never be higher than the end, because the means to realise the same end must be numerous, as they vary according to the temperament or mental capabilities of individual followers (5,386).

The Denouement: Reconciliation


In the most rudimentary terms, bhakti is a bhava, an emotion, while jnana is an existential state in which one is lost in samadhi, with the

individual consciousness merged in universal Consciousness. This is possible for the bhakta when one totally surrenders to the Lord, losing one's individual identity, and transcends the state of *sayujya* when one assumes the Lord's attributes. In other words, one then becomes a *jnani*.

Bhagavadgita appears to identify Sri Krishna with Brahman and promise liberation to those who, with their last breath, chant the single syllable Om: '*Om ity ekaksharam brahma, vyaharan mam anusmaran, yah prayati tyajan deham sa yati paramam gatim*'; he who departs by leaving the body while uttering the single syllable, namely Om, which is Brahman, and thinking of me, he attains the supreme Goal.'²⁸ Om is Brahman; while uttering that syllable as the token of Brahman, one should think of Sri Krishna as its personification. From personification to abstraction is an unbroken continuum. 'He who utters the single syllable Om, which is Brahman, remembering Me as one departs, giving up one's body, one goes to the highest goal.'

This is a clear statement that both the saint and the devotee are after the self-same goal, identified by the saint as Brahman and an incarnation by the devotee. If the supreme is One without a second, where do the many come from? *Taittiriya Upanishad* explains: '*So'kamayata, bahu syam prajayeyeti ... sa tapas taptva idam sarvam asrijata ... tat shrishstva tad evanupravishat*'; he (the supreme soul) desired. Let me become many ... Having performed austerity, he created all this ... Having created it, into it, indeed, he entered.'²⁹

Be that as it may, Sri Ramakrishna clinches the argument once and for all: 'The Reality is one and the same. The difference is only in name. He who is Brahman is verily Atman, and again, He is the Bhagavan. He is Brahman to the followers of the path of knowledge, Paramatman to the yogis, and Bhagavan to the lovers of God.'³⁰

The paths of bhakti and jnana are concurrent and coextensive. There is thus no irony in the saint swapping roles with the devotee, since they are both after the same *ananda* that is Brahman.³¹ 

Notes and References

1. *Avadhuta Gita*, trans. Swami Chetanananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2005).
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4. Patanjali, *Yoga Sutra*, 1.23. Vyasa comments: 'Ishvara will be pleased with the one who merely meditates on him with total conviction.'
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6. Written by the demigod Pushpadanta, one whose teeth are like flower buds and who refers to himself as *kusuma dashana*, one who masticates flowers, this hymn comprises forty-three verses.
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15. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 148–9.
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17. Acharya Shankara, *Aparokshanubhuti*, 43: '*Chaitanyasy aikarupatvad bhedo yukto na karhichit, jivatvam cha mrisha jneyam rajjau sarpagraho yatha*; no division in Consciousness is admissible at any time as it is always one and the same. Even the individuality of the Jiva must be known as false, like the delusion of a snake in a rope.' See *Sri Sankaracharya's Aparokshanubhuti*, trans. Swami Vimuktananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2013), 40–1.
18. *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, trans. Swami Bhuteshananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2009), 21.
19. *Sāṅdilya Bhakti Sutras*, 1.1.2.
20. For instance, *kirtana*, *namaskara*—prostration, *ananyachintana*—one-pointed remembrance, *yajna*, *arpana*—offering.
21. Swami Harshananda, 'Bhakti According to Sandilya', *The Vedanta Kesari*, 45/1 (January 1978), 30–1. Emphasis added.
22. S Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita* (London: G Allen and Unwin, 1948), 58–9.
23. *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, 79; 186.
24. Eternal Truth holds good in all three tenses, present, past, and future—the *tri satya*. The repetition of *bhaktireva gariyasi* indicates that the statement is definitive. The bhakti referred to here is *para bhakti*, which can take any one of eleven different modes: glorification of the Lord's qualities; attachment to Lord's beauty, Lord's worship, or Lord's reminiscence; attachment as a servant to one's master (*dasya*); as a friend (*sneha*); as a parent to one's son (*vatsalya*), or as a wife to her husband (*madhura*); total surrender to God (*sharanagati*); complete absorption in Lord (*sarupya*); and extreme anguish due to separation from Lord.
25. *Dakshinamurti Stotra*, 1.
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Existentialism: An Overview

Arun Chatterjee

Introduction and History

EXISTENTIALISM is a philosophical movement, which has received considerable attention primarily in the twentieth century although the movement began earlier when the writings of Soren Kierkegaard (1813–55) were published. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) also is considered to be a precursor of the movement. Existentialism is not just a movement as it has a philosophical foundation. Some of the ancient philosophers such as Socrates and St Augustine also touched upon some of the themes of existentialism although they are not known as existentialist philosophers. In the twentieth century, existentialism was identified with Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80) more than anyone else.

Other well-known existential philosophers include Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Simone de Beauvoir (1908–86), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61), Albert Camus (1913–60), Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973), and Martin Buber (1878–1965). However, the only philosophers who themselves identified their philosophy to represent existentialism are Sartre and his close friend Simone de Beauvoir. It is interesting to note that neither Kierkegaard nor Nietzsche used the word ‘existentialism’. The word was coined by French philosopher Gabriel Marcel. It also is interesting to note that Camus was a close friend of Sartre, but his friendship with Sartre became strained during the latter part of their careers, and he denied his affinity with existentialism. Camus



Soren Kierkegaard

is recognised more as a literary person than a philosopher. Heidegger also refused to be labelled as an existentialist although he addressed some of the same issues that existentialism deals with, which include anxiety, death, and authenticity.

Existentialism has a strong literary side. Sartre's fictional works such as *Nausea* and *No Exit* are very popular. Camus's novels *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger* are well known. Another interesting character of existentialism is that some of the existential philosophers believed in God and many others were atheists. Kierkegaard was a devout Christian; others who believed in God include Gabriel Marcel, Karl Jaspers (1883–1969), German-American theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965), and Austrian-Israelite Martin Buber. Sartre and Camus were atheists.

This article is meant for those who are not familiar with existentialism and are curious about its scope and history. After examining the philosophical or metaphysical orientation of existentialism I will discuss the major themes of existentialism. I would like to add that of all the existentialist philosophers I will draw

mostly from Sartre's views. I will present a brief discussion on the differences between atheist and Christian existentialist philosophers, and I will present some of the criticisms of Sartre's views.

Philosophical or Metaphysical Orientation of Existentialism

To understand the philosophical principles of existentialism it is important to examine Jean-Paul Sartre's famous statement that 'existence precedes essence'. Traditional philosophies tell us that our essence is some innate nature, or substance, which determines and shapes our life and existence. Existentialism believes that the fundamental truth of our life is existence itself and that we ourselves determine through our actions what we are. It also rejects the concept of traditional philosophy that there is a hidden reality and universal principles, which are expressing themselves through individual lives. Existentialism is concerned with an individual as one exists and one's subjective experience in life rather than treating one as a manifestation of an inherent nature or essence—soul. Existentialism believes that such concepts as Plato's theory of 'forms' or 'ideas', and Hindu philosophy's universal Self or Atman are too speculative to be true, and it also believes that there is no universal essence of humankind and no unifying principle of existence. In the words of Sartre himself: "There is no human nature since there is no God to conceive of it. Man is not only that which he conceives himself to be, but that which he wills himself to be, and since he conceives of himself only after he exists, just as he wills himself to be after being thrown into existence, man is nothing other than what he makes of himself. This is the first principle of existentialism."¹

Existentialism is different from most of the other schools within philosophy such as rationalism, idealism, materialism, and empiricism. The

school of philosophy with which existentialism is closely related to is phenomenology, which is a relatively contemporary method of inquiry. Phenomenology is the study of the phenomenon, which includes objects that we perceive and experience through our consciousness, and it has some similarities with empiricism. However, unlike empiricism, phenomenology includes objects and events that cannot be experienced by the senses but can be experienced only through our consciousness such as the feeling of emotion and desire. Phenomenology focuses on the individual—first person—point of view and one's subjective experience. German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) is recognised as the founder of phenomenology. He was influenced by Franz Brentano (1838–1917). Husserl's focus was on the description of the structures of experience as they present themselves to consciousness.

Phenomenology has had a significant influence on existentialism. Sartre spent a year in Germany to study phenomenology. Heidegger also studied phenomenology under Husserl, but later he rejected some of the concepts of Husserl. Sartre's existentialism basically uses a phenomenological approach, and he fully acknowledged it. His famous book *Being and Nothingness* has the subtitle '*A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*'. In an earlier publication titled *The Transcendence of the Ego*, he wrote about phenomenology that 'for centuries we have not felt in philosophy so realistic a current. The phenomenologists have plunged man back into the world; they have given full measure to man's agonies and sufferings, and also to his rebellions.'² David Detmer explained Sartre's phenomenological approach as follows: 'Sartre says, in effect, "let's go as far as we can simply describing phenomenon and abstaining from positing any objects that we do not experience, such as God, the transcendental ego, the Kantian

thing-in-itself, the Freudian unconscious, and the idea of universal, deterministic causation. Perhaps we'll find that we don't need any of these any more than scientists need gods or demons."³

Major Themes and Concerns of Existentialism

There is a certain amount of misconception among many that existentialism is all about gloomy aspects of human life such as anguish, despair, alienation, nothingness, and death. Although there is some truth behind this view it ignores many positive aspects of existential philosophy such as its focus on individuality, consciousness, freedom to make choices, and authenticity of living. In this short article, I cannot address all these concerns of existentialism and I will discuss only a few. Many of these are interrelated and so it would be hard to discuss each entirely separately, and the discussion of different themes will overlap. Furthermore, all existential philosophers do not agree on all the themes, and my presentation will draw mostly from Sartre's philosophy.

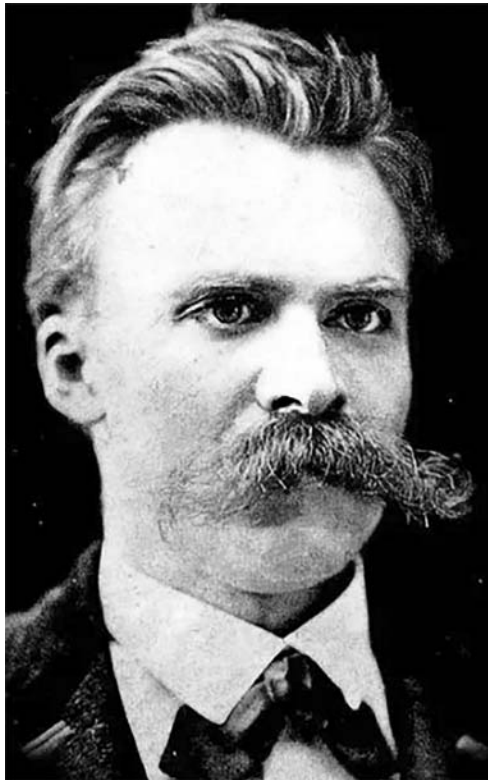
Anguish or Dread and Despair

One of the major themes of existential philosophy is that anguish, anxiety, or angst, is a part of human life. Anguish is also referred to as dread. It should be noted that anguish is different from fear, which has a specific object to be afraid of. Anguish does not have an object that is threatening. It is a strange feeling of dread and uncertainty mixed with worries. Kierkegaard is one of the early existentialist philosophers who wrote about anguish in detail. Sartre also wrote about anguish, and his views on this topic are similar to those of Kierkegaard. What I will present here about anguish would represent the views of both. There are two sources of anxiety—fear of freedom, and the other, existential

nihilism. I will discuss the fear of freedom in this section and nihilism in the next section.

Anguish or dread, is the 'fear of freedom.' At first sight, it may seem strange that there can be any anguish related to one's freedom since freedom is a desirable thing to have. Actually, anguish is referring to the dread of having the freedom to make a choice, which can affect the course of one's life. It also arises from the recognition that one is responsible for the consequences of his choice. Kierkegaard was a Christian, and he gave an example from the Bible. He discussed the anxiety experienced by Adam when he faced the choice of eating or not eating from God's forbidden tree of knowledge. Adam had no concept of good and evil, and he did not know that eating from the tree was 'evil.' But he knew that God told him not to eat from the tree. However, he was aware that he could choose to obey or not to obey God, and this knowledge of freedom to choose caused anguish or dread in him. Unlike Kierkegaard, Sartre was an atheist and he too believed that the awareness of freedom to choose and the awareness of the responsibility that comes with a choice cause anguish. He believed that freedom is hard to handle and most persons who realise that they must make their own choices for which they themselves will be responsible are terrified and suffer from anguish.

Another source of anguish has to do with one's future. According to Sartre, a human being does not have a pre-given nature and one's future depends totally on the actions one chooses to undertake. One's past is given—it is factual, and nothing of it can be changed; but the future presents possibilities of how one can make oneself. Even if one relies on someone else to make a choice for oneself that reliance is one's choice. Sartre rejects the deterministic idea that one's future is dictated by one's past and present, and he believes that one has the freedom



Friedrich Nietzsche

to make one's own future through the choices one makes, but one alone is responsible for the consequences. This responsibility for making one's future overwhelms one and causes anguish.

Kierkegaard discussed another concept related to anxiety and he called it despair. The concept of despair as discussed by Kierkegaard is complex, and I will not discuss it in depth. Despair is related to a person's understanding of one's true self and one's ability to relate to it. A person's self has many dimensions—finite and infinite, possibility and necessity, body and soul, and so on. When a person's self is out of balance and one has a wrong conception of who one truly is, one feels lost as to what one can and cannot do, and this causes despair. Kierkegaard also wrote that a person is in despair when one is not able to align oneself with God and one's plan about oneself.

Existential Nihilism

Existential nihilism is a concept of atheistic existentialism. It presents a viewpoint that traditional values and beliefs are baseless. It rejects the existence of anything capable of giving a value to human life beyond whatever values individuals are capable of creating for themselves. The term 'nihilism' is also used to represent the view that there is no solid foundation or essence underlying one's existence and that life is meaningless. According to Sartre, 'existence precedes essence'.⁴ The lack of any foundation and meaning of life is also referred to as nothingness. The recognition of the lack of any intrinsic value of life and also the nothingness of human existence causes anguish.

The concept of nihilism has been discussed in philosophy circles for a long time now. Among all modern philosophers, Friedrich Nietzsche is well known for his nihilistic views. Nietzsche proclaimed that 'God is dead'. What he meant by this statement is that we cannot rely on God and religious texts to find the meaning of our lives. Furthermore, according to Nietzsche, people have a 'herd mentality', and they try to conform to what others expect. They accept the views of religious texts and use their values as a guide for living. However, some persons wake up, as it were, and begin to question the authoritative values and standards, which they have been following. When they realise that those pre-given values have no solid foundation and that their lives have no meaning, they feel existential anxiety. It is interesting to note that although Nietzsche studied and wrote about nihilism extensively, actually he was critical of nihilism as a mode of living. Nietzsche saw an opportunity for awakened individuals to construct their own meaning and values for their lives.

In the twentieth century, the threat of nihilism was discussed by two famous philosophers—Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Camus is

known for his view that life is absurd and that it is futile to seek meaning in life when there is none. Sartre also thought that a person's life has no intrinsic value; however, he also believed that it is up to the person to give one's life meaning and so his view was not as negative as that of Camus.

Freedom and Responsibility

The concept of freedom is a major part, if not the corner stone, of Sartre's philosophy. Freedom is related to other existential issues such as anxiety and authenticity. I already mentioned that Sartre believed that anguish is caused by one's awareness of one's freedom of making choices for actions and being responsible for the consequences arising from the choices. However, more needs to be discussed about Sartre's view of freedom.

Sartre rejected the philosophy of determinism. He wrote that we are 'condemned to be free', which means that we can never simply be who we are, but that we must continuously make choices for making ourselves to be how we want to be in the future. Even when we follow the advice or guidance of someone else for making a choice for us, it still is our choice to do so and we are responsible. According to Sartre, even those who choose not to act in a situation are still making a conscious choice for their inaction and thus are responsible for the consequences of their inaction. Some of us try to evade our responsibility for making our own choices and thus live in 'bad faith', which I will discuss soon. It is when we are conscious reflectively that we are aware of our freedom.

Some raise objections to Sartre's concept of total freedom and point out that many things in our lives are given and that they determine, or at least influence, our choices. Examples of what are given are, our lives are heredity, financial constraints of our parents, social impediments, and so on. These are called 'facticity'. Thus, we

cannot be fully responsible for our choices. Sartre recognises the limitations to our freedom caused by facticity, but he argues that despite the effect of facticity in our lives it does not totally determine us and that we can 'transcend' it. It should be noted that when Sartre uses the expression 'making a choice' he is assuming that the person is using reflective consciousness.

Authenticity and Bad Faith

Existential philosophers care for morality and ethics, and authentic behaviour is an important issue for existentialism. Unlike religions and orthodox philosophies, which prescribe certain moral and ethical ways of actions and choices for all, existentialism emphasises the individuality and the freedom of a person to make one's choices. However, the individuality, which existential philosophy emphasises, must be reflected in the behaviour and actions of individuals, and it urges an individual to act authentically. Authenticity and bad faith, which are opposites of each other, are major themes of existentialism.

Authenticity has to do with how our actions and behaviours reflect our true nature and true intentions. At first consideration, it may appear that our actions always reflect our true nature and intentions. However, it is a fact that many times we change our actions and behaviour just to conform with the expectations of other persons or society in which we live; and when we do that we are acting in an inauthentic way, and Sartre calls this to be a case of 'bad faith'. Often, we even deceive ourselves by believing in something that we deep-down inside know to be false. Sometimes we live in a make-believe world, and we believe that the lies we tell are true. All these cases are examples of inauthentic behaviour and bad faith.

At first sight, the concept of authenticity appears to be fairly straightforward, but there are many issues related to it. There are no sets of

standards by which one can assess if one's actions are authentic. Authenticity has an internal aspect and a person must know oneself—one's own nature, very well. Traditionally we follow religious and/or socially acceptable values to follow, but existentialism wants us to develop our own values based on how we truly feel. If I sincerely like to pursue music or art as a career, but I choose engineering or medicine as a career to please my parents and/or to earn more money, I will not be true to myself. If I have a dream of becoming an artist, I should pursue that career doggedly. According to Sartre, authenticity often involves transcending one's facticity. Facticity represents one's past and what is given, and it may include certain constraints one faces in life. However, it may be possible to overcome the constraints, meaning, to transcend facticity. In that case, authenticity will involve transcending or going beyond facticity and pursuing one's true nature.

An example of bad faith will be a person who is overweight because she or he eats too much junk food and does not exercise. One knows that one should lose weight, but instead of cutting back on junk food and beginning an exercise routine, one convinces oneself that she or he is overweight because of her or his genetic disposition and that there is nothing she or he can do to lose weight. This clearly is a case of self-deception and thus is bad faith.

Alienation

The problem of alienation has been addressed by several philosophers some of whom are not existentialists. Alienation involves two entities—self of a person, a subject, and another entity, which may be a person, a family, or a society. Alienation occurs when there is a problematic separation between these two entities instead of a harmonious and loving relationship. Alienation may lead to hostility and it causes

severe mental distress. The problem of alienation or estrangement is serious in today's society. Wealth disparity leads to alienation among persons of different income classes. Today we have billionaires living in our society along with homeless persons, and naturally, there is a separation between them. We sometimes feel estranged from our institutions when we find them not taking care of our needs. Today's technology can cause alienation as it may keep us so occupied and distracted that we may not find time to communicate with our family members and friends. The alienation within a family is very unfortunate but very common. The high divorce rate among married couples, which involves alienation, is alarming in many modern countries.

Christian Existentialists

There are several Christian existentialists and I mentioned their names in the introduction section of the article. Here I will discuss briefly the views of two Christian existentialists. Soren Kierkegaard, who is considered to be the father of existentialism, was a devout Christian. He wrote about the frustration of ordinary people in various forms such as anguish, despair, and alienation. Other existentialists—atheist and theist—accepted Kierkegaard's views and basically elaborated on those issues from their own perspective. The primary difference between him and an atheist philosopher like Sartre is that he believed in the possibility of reducing the pain and frustrations of our life whereas Sartre or Camus did not see any way out.

Kierkegaard identified three stages of life—the aesthetic stage, the ethical stage, and the religious stage. He described the aesthetic and ethical stages in his book *Either/Or*, and he described the religious stage in his book *Fear and Trembling*.⁵ Each stage has its own kind of despair. A person living in the aesthetic stage

lives an unreflective life over which one has no control. One's only goal is pleasure. However, an aesthete gradually recognises that one's desire is insatiable and that one's pursuit of pleasure does not bring one a lasting state of happiness and value in one's life. This causes frustration and despair, and by the force of one's will she or he may change her or his approach to life and move on to the next stage of life, which is the ethical stage. Living an ethical life involves the use of reason and moral principles. At the ethical stage, a person leads a life of conformity to accepted moral and ethical principles of society. An ethical person comes to despair because of one's guilt over not being the ideally moral person one feels she or he is obligated to become. One feels that she or he has reached a dead end. One realises that the only option to move beyond this situation is to accept God as one's refuge and guide. One then moves on to the religious stage.

The transition from the aesthetic stage to the ethical stage requires a 'leap of faith'. Another leap is required to move from the ethical stage to the religious stage. Within the religious stage Kierkegaard identifies two regions—Region A and Region B. Region A is the initial phase of the religious stage, and here a person relies mostly on one's own effort whereas in Region B, one renounces one's ego and completely surrenders to God. The religious stage, in general, involves moving away from worldly desires and relying only on God for guidance as to how to live. Kierkegaard points out that it is not easy to develop a personal relation with God and dedicate everything one does to God. One has to try over and again to live with complete faith in God. One experiences frustration until she or he finally feels the presence of a loving God, who offers her or him forgiveness, consolation, peace, and joy. It is only a saint who can reach this stage. The movement from Region A to B requires a leap of faith.

Another Christian existentialist, who was a contemporary of Sartre is Gabriel Marcel. He criticised some aspects of Sartre's philosophy, and I will present his criticisms in the following section. Marcel recognised the problems of everyday life, which include anxiety and despair; but he had a positive view of life, and he offered the concepts 'creative fidelity' and 'hope'. His notion of God was different from traditional views. He believed that we should think of God as a loving father and consider our life as a gift. Further, we should have creative fidelity to this gift. What he meant is that one should actively keep oneself open to God and live her or his life with creative impulse and love. Moreover, one should share her or his love and friendship with others. Interpersonal relations and acts of love and friendship were important for Marcel. Creative fidelity is supported by hope, and Marcel's hope is an attitude of confidence in something greater than us and believing that we are moving towards something higher and better. He believed that such hope gives one the strength to maintain fidelity to God, and it enables one to overcome anxiety and despair.

Jean-Paul Sartre



Criticisms of Sartrean Existentialism and Its Defence

In this section, I would like to discuss an important event involving Sartre, which throws considerable light on his views on existentialism. The event is a public lecture that Sartre gave in Paris on 19 October 1945. The lecture was very well attended and received considerable attention. What prompted Sartre to give this lecture involves mainly two of his concerns. First, he thought that existentialism was being misinterpreted by many people somewhat frivolously. Second, existentialism was being criticised by the communists—Marxists—and by the Catholic Church. The Marxists were complaining that the emphasis on individualism, subjectivism, and freedom promotes selfishness and ignores the solidarity of people and the importance of collective good. According to them, existentialism is a bourgeois philosophy. The Catholic Church was concerned about existentialism ignoring the teachings of the Bible and Christian values. Christian critics claimed that existentialism focuses only on the bad aspects of human character and ignores the moral and ethical aspects of life. Both these sources of criticism were accusing existentialism of lacking any concern for collective humanism and failing to present principles and guidelines of social ethics and morality. Sartre recognised that it was time to defend his philosophy against these criticisms and tried to do that by presenting the lecture titled *Existentialism is a Humanism*.⁶ Some of the main points he tried to make are discussed now.

Sartre claimed that when an individual makes a choice from alternative courses of actions, one does not choose only for oneself and that one actually chooses for all human beings. In his words: 'When we say that man chooses himself not only do we mean that each of us must choose

himself, but also that in choosing himself, he is choosing for all men' (24). To this assertion, Sartre added: 'We always choose the good, and nothing can be good for any of us unless it is good for all' (ibid.). Sartre was trying to equate an individual choice with collective choice. Despite these arguments, Sartre's philosophy has been criticised by some scholars, who believe that he provided little guidance for making a choice of actions. To defend his philosophy, Sartre gave an example of a real-life event when a student of his sought his advice as to whether he should stay with his lonely mother who was dependent on him, or should he join the Free French Army in England and fight the German Nazis who had killed his older brother. Sartre told him: 'You are free, so choose; in other words, invent. No general code of ethics can tell you what you ought to do; there are no signs in this world' (33). In the context of this advice of Sartre, a philosophy scholar T Z Lavine wrote: 'But does it not strike you as incredible that Sartre, the great master of French existentialism, who presents himself, along with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, as the type of philosopher who wants to offer a philosophy for modern man to live by, has nothing more to offer the morally conflicted student than to say: choose, and take the responsibility?'⁷

Another controversial issue is Sartre's views about freedom. Sartre believed that freedom is the definition of a person and the foundation of all values. Some of his claims related to a person's freedom are contentious. Sartre again tried to equate individual freedom with collective freedom. He wrote, 'And in thus willing freedom, we discover that it depends entirely on the freedom of others, and that the freedom of others depends on our own'.⁸

Sartre was criticised for not presenting any guidelines for ethical and moral actions. A


contemporary philosopher Gabriel Marcel, whom Sartre called a Christian existentialist, criticised Sartre for presenting pernicious and bad advice for the young people of that time. It may be said in defence of Sartre that his philosophy includes a few concepts that have an ethical aspect. These include his criticism of acting in 'bad faith'. He also wrote about acting authentically. However, a close examination of these concepts would reveal that these—bad faith and authenticity—basically involve making a choice of action freely and that there are no solid guidelines for choosing correctly. It may be said that a choice made freely is not necessarily a moral and/or ethical choice.

In trying to retrofit his philosophy for defending it from the criticisms of the communists and the Catholic Church, Sartre in his speech perhaps went a little too far to claim that his concepts of individual freedom and choice form a social and moral philosophy. Some of these ideas and claims are contrary to his own views expressed in previous writings such as *Being and Nothingness*.⁹ It is interesting to note that Sartre himself recognised the flaws of his lecture and he regretted that the lecture was published.

Concluding Remarks

Existentialism is important in two ways—as a cultural movement and as a type of philosophy. As a cultural movement, existentialism has lost its original glamour, but it has continued to play an important role in contemporary philosophical thought although no major existential philosopher has emerged after Jean-Paul Sartre. Existentialism added a new dimension or aspect to the subject of philosophy in general. Its orientation is different from that of traditional philosophies. Existentialist philosophers did not like speculative philosophy

and the construction of metaphysical systems. One must admit that what it has to say about the lives of human beings is realistic; but, as some would criticise, it focuses primarily on the harsh realities of existing life.

Traditional philosophies and religions recognise a person's unhappiness and suffering in life, but they are reluctant to accept anguish and suffering as essential aspects of life. They try to show various ways to overcome suffering and attain peace and tranquillity. In contrast to the approach of traditional philosophies and religions, existentialism attempts to uncover the harsh realities of life not for escaping them but to face them head-on and see them as they are. For atheistic existentialist philosophers, a person's life does not have any intrinsic meaning, but the meaning must be created by one by making choices, and one has the freedom to make choices. Furthermore, one must take responsibility of the choices one makes. Christian existentialists prescribe having faith in God and finding the meaning of life through God. Most of the principles of existentialism are undeniable. 

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Bridging Gaps, Creating Divides —Sanskrit Classics, Europe, and the Nineteenth-Century Politics of Translation

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PERHAPS NOTHING better captures the dynamics of the civilisational interface between India and Europe as the practice of translation of classical Sanskrit texts into European languages in the nineteenth century. It is a founding premise and ‘problem’ of comparative literature that translation entails not so much a transfer as a transformation of meaning, especially when the two ecumenes involved are vastly separated by time, space, and worldview. This essay examines the process of translation into English of the ‘first work of history in India’, the celebrated Sanskrit epic, *Rajatarangini* of the twelfth century to argue that it may have transformed the text in complex and crucial ways. Though traditional Sanskrit poetry, replete with the aesthetic form, conventions, and concerns of the *kavya* genre, its exegesis at the hands of European Orientalists, like Harold Hayman Wilson, Georg Buhler, and Aurel Stein, laid the groundwork for its reincarnation in the genre of history—with lasting, fraught results. Aspects of figuration proper to a traditional discourse, like rhetoric, myth, and the ethico-didactic, were dismissed whereas empiricist qualities, like chronology, causation and objectivity, were valorised, whether or not these were central to the originary Sanskrit literary culture. This essay attempts to locate this recasting of the poem’s meaning and purpose in the intellectual and political trends of the nineteenth and

twentieth century, and to call attention to the many grave epistemic contradictions this introduced in the modern understanding of an iconic ancient Indian text. It thereby demonstrates that via translation, India was not just transferred to but transformed in post-Enlightenment Europe.

It may be fair to say that no matter the commitment to semantic fidelity or even literalism, translation seems to inevitably involve in some degree or the other a change not only in the language of discourse but, with that, in its meaning as well. The acquired or altered meaning, in the interests of intelligibility, may tend to align with the interpretive apparatus of the literary or intellectual culture into which the text is being translated, rather than that of the originating culture. This is particularly so when the two ecumenes at either end of this journey are separated by centuries and also by continents, and their conceptual categories and modes of representation, not to say concerns and world views, may be incommensurable and irreducible to that of each other. What may follow in such a situation is something of a shift in the characterisation and typology of the text and its evaluation, post-translation, in terms of disciplinary parameters alien to it.

In the light of these observations, this essay scrutinises the modern reinvention of the iconic *Rajatarangini*, the sprawling, twelfth-century,

versified account in Sanskrit of the kings of Kashmir from the earliest to the poet, Kalhana's, own time. Though traditional Sanskrit poetry, replete with the aesthetic form, conventions, and concerns of the genre of *kavya*,¹ its translation and exegesis at the hands of the early European Orientalists in India laid the groundwork for its reincarnation in the genre of history—with lasting but fraught results. This paper traces the process of transformation that the *Rajatarangini* underwent through translation, and the intellectual and political conditions in which this occurred, and calls attention to the many epistemic contradictions this introduced in the modern understanding of the medieval text.

The first to attempt a study and partial translation of the *Rajatarangini* into English in the year 1825 was Horace Hayman Wilson, then secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal who also translated, during his long association with the pioneering orientalist society as well as with the East India Company College, other works in Sanskrit such as Kalidasa's *Meghaduta* and the *Vishnu Purana*. Terming it 'the Hindu History of Cashmir', Wilson famously observed about Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* that it was 'the only Sanskrit composition yet discovered, to which the title of History, can with any propriety be applied.'² His reasons were simple and can be summarised as the text's deference to chronology, assigning dates for the start and end of every regime; its alleged quest for objectivity, seen in the poet's call to impartiality; and its display of causation, attributing events to explanations.

The true import of Wilson's comment can be understood against the background of the then-emerging misconception and propaganda that Indian civilisation was singularly lacking in historical sense or consciousness, a notion that came to stick. This 'lack', in turn, was believed to be on account of other stereotypes that were

developing about India as the British colonial regime established itself in the early nineteenth century, namely, a greater proclivity of Indians to spiritual over material interests on the one hand, and a basic changelessness and stasis of Indian society itself, on the other. These together were deemed responsible for the apparent dearth of historical literature, especially as compared to an abundance of scriptures, mythologies, and aesthetic works produced in the subcontinent in the premodern period. It needs no labouring to see that, despite his lifelong sympathy to the cause of indigenous Indian languages and culture, Wilson's judgement on the *Rajatarangini* as being *the sole exception* to Sanskrit literary culture's indifference to history, both sprung from and, more importantly, fed into the notion of that culture's ahistoricity.

Perhaps the defining moment in the journey of the *Rajatarangini* was when the German paleographer and Sanskrit scholar, Georg Buhler, a member of the Bombay branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, followed by his remarkable Hungarian-British pupil, the ethnographer-geographer Marc Aurel Stein, undertook its detailed study, an initiative that lasted many years. Stein brought out the first critical edition of the text in 1892 followed by its complete and authoritative English translation accompanied by a commentary of sorts in 1900.³ Buhler's and Stein's separate writings on the *Rajatarangini* operated well within the Orientalist framework and reinforced Wilson's founding characterisation of the text as a unique historical narrative, qualifying it only in so far as Stein emphasised the regional character of the (historical) enterprise and its rootedness in the local geography, which he painstakingly attempted to reconstruct on the ground in Kashmir, thereby imputing to the text a defining commitment to an empirical documentation of the past.

It is worth remarking that, following from his apparent impatience for the purely poetic qualities of the text, Stein's translation, which was in any case in prose, chose to expunge several such verses as he deemed excessively rhetorical, didactic, and conventionalised and so contributing little to the 'information' the text otherwise, in his estimation, so valuably provided. Thus, as Ranjit Sitaram Pandit, a Kashmiri scholar of Sanskrit, who produced his own English translation of the poem in 1935, puts it: '[Stein's] method of translation does not give an adequate conception of the work as a literary composition ... Further, his main interest in the chronicle was archaeological and topographical and he omitted to translate verses which according to him are in the "Kavya style"'.⁴ Though Pandit claimed to remedy this omission in his rendering that came to parallel Stein's in popularity, he nonetheless acknowledged the dichotomy of classifying the text as history or poetry.⁵ The label of history for the *Rajatarangini*, thus, had come to stay. A recent work has compared and critiqued Stein and Pandit's translations and ideological and interpretive locations and so that need not detain us here.⁶ The point to note, however, is that Stein's editorial selection or suppression, though quantitatively minor, assumes significance for what it reveals about the direction in which the text was being further pushed along at the turn of the twentieth century by scholarly interpretation and privileging of 'objective' over 'subjective' qualities.

The classification and indeed celebration of the *Rajatarangini* as a work of history, which was inaugurated by philologists, was sealed and stamped by historians in the post-Independence era. Thus in 1961, Kalhana was officially included in a seminal volume on *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, where preeminent Indologist Arthur Llewellyn Basham and the Nationalist historian Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, using Stein's edition

as authoritative, essentially repeated the earlier points in praise of the text. See for example this representative statement from Basham: 'The work is unique as the only attempt at true history in the whole of surviving Sanskrit literature.'⁷ Or this from Majumdar: 'Even a modern historian should have little hesitation in ranking Kalhana as a great historian ... [for his] correct appreciation of the true ideals and methods of history.'⁸ Their definitive statements became the bible for future generations of scholars and continue to be taught in Indian universities till today.

There was, however, one major problem in this glowing cumulative appraisal. All these translators and interpreters of the *Rajatarangini* were deeply disturbed by other aspects of the text that did not fit their rather positivist idea of what history should be—aspects which they then had to disown and describe as 'failings' and 'imperfections'. Thus, as we have seen, Stein thought the rhetorical and didactic parts of the *Rajatarangini* were redundant to the narrative proper, which was historical, while Buhler condemned the resort to myth as rendering the chronology of a large part of the text 'valueless' and the author suspect.⁹ Indeed the latter even translated a famous verse from Kalhana's preamble in such a fashion as to provocatively imply that the poet had no qualms in doctoring—lengthening or shortening—the dates and durations of the reign of different kings to fit the needs of his composition. The verse in question bears quoting to illustrate what Pandit called 'the gravity and nature of the errors occasionally committed by learned European scholars' (9, footnote 21): '*Iyam nripanam ullase hrase va deshakalayoh, Bhaishajya bhutasamvadi katha yuktopayujyate*'.¹⁰

The above verse can much more readily and comprehensibly be translated as philosophically presenting the *Rajatarangini* as a medicine or remedy, *bhaishajya*, prescribed for kings in a state of ascendance or decline in their realms

and reigns, *ullase hrase va deshakalayoh*.¹¹ Indeed Buhler's far-fetched and unsupported translation was shown by S P Pandit¹² and even Stein to be completely flawed, but what it points to for our purpose is the lingering instinctive mistrust that accompanied the conferring of the title of history on this traditional Sanskrit text.

The contradictions involved in imposing this category of objectivist history become still more acute in Majumdar. Despite christening Kalhana 'a great historian', Majumdar enumerated a long list of 'failings' and spoke of his 'very defective' method consisting in the inclusion of mythical or legendary kings, the assigning of 'absurd' lengths of rule to some out of 'a blind faith in the Epics and Puranas', a belief in witchcraft and magic, explanation of events as due to the influence of fate 'rather than to any rational cause', a didactic tendency inspired by Hindu views of karma, and treating historical events 'merely as backgrounds for display of poetical and rhetorical skill'.¹³ Based on this vantage both he and Basham maintained that the first three *tarangas* or books of the *Rajatarangini* were less credible than the last five. Influentially, following their lead, Romila Thapar in 1983, again as part of a volume on *Historians of Medieval India*, suggested a separation between 'earlier books', where supernatural causes and fate were important, and 'later' ones, that reflected, we are told, 'the maturity of Kalhana's historical thinking'. She also dismissed Kalhana's moralism and didacticism.¹⁴

The *Rajatarangini* thus ended up splintered, obfuscating in complex ways the nature of the original text as a whole. Especially damaging was that all aspects of figuration proper to a poetic discourse were deemed redundant, extraneous, and detrimental to the essentially 'historical' substance and intent of Kalhana's enterprise. It is significant that though derived from modern objectivist notions of history in the West, rather

than from any indigenous or ancient approaches to treating of the past, the underlying belief in the opposition of 'factual' (true) history and 'fictive' (false) literature was new even to nineteenth century Europe.¹⁵ The Rankean or positivist turn in European historiography, with its stress on facticity, objectivity, and scientific method, merged with imperialism through the agency of the likes of James Mill who as early as 1817, in his notorious *The History of British India*, had launched a diatribe against 'backward' Indian culture that did not match up to the Greco-Roman or Judaeo-Christian civilisations. The result was a downgrading and delegitimising of indigenous Indian narratives of the past.¹⁶ Relatedly, in being isolated as a flawed exception in all of Sanskrit literature, the *Rajatarangini* as history was both the creation and victim of an intellectual approach that sought to simultaneously appropriate and undermine a traditional Sanskrit text. In the remainder of this essay I shall focus on three of the major errors of category executed by modern translations of the *Rajatarangini* with respect to chronology, myth and causality, and objectivity.

Let us first take up the merit of assigning dates and sequence. While there is no doubt that Kalhana's punctilious dating of reigns is remarkable, it was not the first time that such an exercise was undertaken in early India, since *vamshavalis* or traditional royal genealogies in Sanskrit and other languages in the early medieval period, not to mention the genealogies in the eighteen major Puranas, did much the same in what was obviously a long-standing, documenting practice.¹⁷ This traditional character and functional trait of the *Rajatarangini* is entirely missed by stressing its uniqueness on account of sequential dating. That apart, scholarly valorising of linear dating of events ignores the fact that while all narratives necessarily manipulate time by rearranging it to configure a meaningful pattern,

there could be different modes of configuring temporality in different times and cultures, and even within a single culture, including distinctly non-linear modes. Thus, you have the cyclical concept of *chaturyuga*—the four, recurring mega-periods of moral ascent and decline, *krita*, *treta*, *dvapara*, and *kali*—which constitutes the understanding of time deployed across centuries by seminal texts of the Indic tradition like the Puranas and the Mahabharata and Ramayana. As such the yugas may be regarded as a culturally popular choice for rendering time and so it is no surprise that Kalhana himself uses the *kaliyuga* as the basis of the dates he ascribes to the early kings of Kashmir. In other words, there may be nothing inherently virtuous in a twelfth-century Sanskrit composition providing a linear chronology to its narrative, nor, in principle, anything objectionable in its resort to the cyclical *chaturyuga*. Yet the latter was regarded as unacceptable in the *Rajatarangini*, as we have seen, a show of ‘blind faith in Epics and Puranas’ (Majumdar) and a reliance on ‘legendary and fictive events’ (Buhler), such as the Mahabharata war, which is traditionally believed to separate the *dvapara* from the *kali*. So even as deference to chronology was a good thing, choice of a culturally specific, if mythical, system of dating was not!

One of the things this conflicted evaluation of the *Rajatarangini* exposed was the empiricist understanding of the mythical, much like the poetic, as always fictive and false. In other words, myths and legends in the *Rajatarangini* evoked distrust, even dismissal, because modern scholars, forever measuring literary truth by its veracity rather than its epistemic function, treated them as incapable of capturing meanings and values imputed to the past. Indeed, the disappointment all modern translators of the text expressed with mythical aspects of the *Rajatarangini* may have had more to do with

the particular, a priori, nature of historic truth they were searching for than with the kind of truth the text deploying myth was interested in conveying. For instance, as has been postulated for ancient Greek mythology, myth need not be about the ‘real’ as truth, but about *what was noble as truth*.¹⁸ Indeed myths in the *Rajatarangini* about unrighteous kings and their cities that were destroyed by the anger of tutelary deities, *nagas*, or about the origins of the land in an act of the great gods—display precisely such a meaning and function in Kalhana’s ethicised political commentary.¹⁹ This would however be apparent only if the didacticism of the text is recognised as essential to the text’s scheme of things, as I argue, rather than as external and superfluous to it, as most other scholars have maintained.

The other quality rather ardently ascribed to Kalhana, that of objectivity or impartiality, may also be based on an interpretive presumption. The verse typically cited in support of this quality is the seventh in the preamble of the poem. There, in Kalhana’s description of the poets’ speech, *sarasvati*, being rid of liking or hatred when speaking of past matters, *ragadvesha-bahishkrita bhutartha-kathane*, modern historians have read a manifesto for the ideal historian. This is premised, however, on a circular assumption that Kalhana is referring to a historian at work; Majumdar explicitly says so.²⁰ In fact, however, the verse must be read together with the verses preceding and following it, all of which refer only to the talented poet, *gunavan kavi*; there is no other term even remotely resembling ‘historian’. Indeed, a Sanskritist has recently argued that this verse ought to be translated instead in consonance with a *kavya*’s typical agenda, namely, the evocation of a *rasa* or abstracted aesthetic state. In Kalhana’s case this was his stated project of generating a state of equipoise, *shanta rasa*, though his composition²¹

which, as stipulated by the leading *kavya* theoreticians of the time like Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta, required the experiencing of a similar calm and detachment, *vairagya*, not impartiality, by the poet himself.²²

In any case, we now know that objectivity—‘*the truth out there as it was*’—as the foundation of the historian’s enterprise is open to questioning, even ‘a preposterous fallacy’,²³ given the central role of subjective and variable inference and interpretation in the reconstruction of an essentially unobservable past.²⁴ Moreover, ironically contradicting his stated aesthetic dispassion, detached and impartial are the last things Kalhana is when narrating the good or evil deeds of Kashmiris. His deep personal involvement in the events he narrates and moralises over is stark. Indeed, there are verses where Kalhana is clearly choosing to be the partisan of the good and the virtuous, and to be contemptuous and denunciatory towards dubious and evil characters, even adopting obscene or scatological language in the latter case, which is highly unusual in Sanskrit poetry.²⁵ At such moments, significantly, ethics seem to have weighed more with Kalhana than aesthetics.


The final trait I take up for discussion that translators of the *Rajatarangini* chose to highlight was its tendency to supply causes for most occurrences. Implicit in this favourable valuation of causation was the faith that it displayed in rationality. Such an expectation of rationality is, however, immediately demolished via the common criticism, from the same scholars, that Kalhana frequently cited fate and other supernatural forces. In other words, it was not just commitment to causality that was expected of Kalhana but a particular brand of empirical rationality, failing which this supposedly historical trait would lose meaning. Such an understanding of historical causality, however, overlooks the complexity of

a traditional causal vision. Fate, *bhagya*, in the *Rajatarangini* is deployed in multiple contexts, in ‘earlier’ and ‘later’ *tarangas* alike. Thus inscrutable providence shows up as a poetic device in situations of inexplicability, like king Jayapida’s sudden change of character from an enlightened ruler to an oppressive one which brings forth an exclamation from Kalhana invoking fate (4.620). Most of all, as the fruits of karma in a past life, *bhagya* is used as a didactic device, a source of blessing or punishment according to good or bad deeds of individuals or Kashmiri society as a whole. Thus the death of the cruel and tyrannical king Mihirakula is said to be ‘owing to the dawn of the subjects’ merit’, *prajapunyodayaih*, while the plunder of Kashmir under officials of queen Didda is regarded as ‘the result of its accumulated evil actions’, *dushkritaih* (1.325, 6.288). The main point is that karma and fate serve as an opportunity for Kalhana to, once again, insert a moral perspective, which, I believe, is his chief interest throughout the text. On another plane, beyond the boundaries of empiricism and verifiability, fate may be construed as a particularly suitable literary device for a tale of time, since it resonates with a connectedness of the past and present, and as such is profoundly causal, if not apparently so.²⁶

This essay thus argues that the recasting of the *Rajatarangini* as objectivist history, credited with modern qualities neither unique nor central to the concerns of the text, but shorn of all features and recurrent tendencies, like rhetoric, myth, and didacticism, true to the traditional Sanskrit poetry that it was, spawned an understanding of the text that was divorced from its literary culture and logic, and was collapsible under its own contradictions. While there is a strong case therefore for revisiting this troubled translation of the text, as I have tried to show in this essay, it remains to be asked whether this means that the *Rajatarangini* was entirely bereft of historicity.

Or that whether we are returning in effect to the very opposition of history and literature that we have been critiquing. The answer to both questions is no, and that it is possible and desirable to restore the *Rajatarangini* to a more integral notion of historicity that is sensitive to the literary. How is this to be done? A new breed of Sanskritists like Walter Slaje, Whitney Cox, and Lawrence McCrea have recently shown us a few ways to read portions of the text in this fashion.²⁷

Adopting a different tack from theirs, and looking at the text as a whole, in my recent book *The Making of Early Kashmir*, I have proposed the need to focus on the metapoetics of the *Rajatarangini*'s parent-genre, Sanskrit *kavya*—something that seems to have been scarcely deferred to by the European translators of the text and the British and Indian historians alike who, as we saw, thought it fit to bracket out the entire rhetorical and didactic component of the poem despite the fact that this constituted, not coincidentally, the bulk of it.²⁸ To outline my argument there, I emphasise that both *kavya* generally and the *Rajatarangini* in particular staked claim to a privileged epistemic insight that extended to matters past—a claim that deserves to be taken seriously despite its conventional nature. Thus to give just one example, Kalhana, in a self-reflexive vein and echoing many a Sanskrit rhetorician and poet before him, speaks of the *kavi* being able to gauge the true nature of all things by virtue of his poetic intuition, *pratibhaya*, and divine sight, *divyadrishhti*. As he puts it: 'Who else is capable of making visible, *pratyakshatam*, bygone times except the poet-creator, *kavi prajapati* ... ?'²⁹ And this is no empty boast; alongside a meticulously referential documentation of umpteen figures and events from Kashmir's history, Kalhana's representation of the past was also deeply imbued with moral principles that

constituted, according to him, true knowledge of time and human action. I have argued that, again true to a *kavya*, the primary enterprise of the *Rajatarangini* was the representation of Kashmir as a discursive political space mediated by an ethical paradigm, and that through his normative prescription of monarchical power as well as his philosophical critique of it, Kalhana narrativised Kashmir's past, lending shape and unity to a vast cycle of time. In sum, such a translation alone that does justice to the injunctive-ethical ideals and framework of the *Rajatarangini* can perhaps do justice to its literary and historical vision. And such an approach alone that reads and respects Sanskrit literature on its own terms can perhaps challenge persistent colonial epistemic hierarchies. 

Notes and References

1. *Kavya* is highly aesthetic poetry or prose characterised by the use of indirect and figurative language, *vakrokti*, *alamkara*, and the evocation of essentialised emotional states, *rasa*.
2. See Horace H Wilson, 'An Essay on the Hindu History of Cashmir', *Asiatick Researches*, 15 (1825), 1–119.
3. See Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* or *Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir*, Volume 1, ed. M A Stein (Sanskrit Text with Critical Notes) (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1960 [Bombay, 1892]). The first complete translation from the original Sanskrit appeared in French by M Troyer in 1852. Its first full English translation was by Yogesh Chunder Dutt in 1879–87, but, like Troyer's work, it was based on the uncritical Calcutta edition widely regarded subsequently as erroneous.
4. Ranjit Sitaram Pandit, *The River of Kings: Rajatarangini, The Saga of the Kings of Kashmir* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2004 [1935, 1968]), xv.
5. See *The River of Kings: Rajatarangini, The Saga of the Kings of Kashmir*, 'Translator's Note', xiii–xvii. An interesting reflection of the belief in this dichotomy was also reflected in Jawaharlal Nehru's observation in the Foreword to Pandit's

- translation: 'It is a history and it is a poem, though the two perhaps go ill together' (ix).
6. See Chitrakleha Zutshi, 'Translating the Past: Rethinking Rajatarangini Narratives in Colonial India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 70/1 (2011), 5–27.
 7. A L Basham, 'The Kashmir Chronicle', *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, ed. C H Philips (London: Oxford University, 1961), 58.
 8. R C Majumdar, 'Ideas of History in Sanskrit Literature', *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, 14, 25. Emphasis added.
 9. Quoted in *The River of Kings: Rajatarangini, The Saga of the Kings of Kashmir*, xv, 8, footnote 21.
 10. Kalhana, *Rajatarangini*, 1.21.
 11. This is the translation accepted by recent scholars Richard Salomon and Walter Slaje. For both see Walter Slaje, "In the Guise of Poetry"—Kalhana Reconsidered', *Shastrarambha: Enquiries into the Preamble in Sanskrit* (Göttingen, Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 2008), 233.
 12. S P Pandit was Ranjit Sitaram Pandit's uncle and, like his nephew, a scholar of Sanskrit and Prakrit. See footnote 9 above for a discussion of his critique of Buhler's reading.
 13. 'Ideas of History in Sanskrit Literature', 22–4.
 14. Romila Thapar, 'Kalhana', *Historians of Medieval India*, ed. Mohibbul Hasan (New Delhi: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1983), 52–62.
 15. Nineteenth century Europe also saw exceptions to the Rankean school in the form of Hegel, Droysen, Nietzsche, and Croce who stressed the inventive aspect of the historian's putative enquiry, and that 'facts' were not apodictically provided but constituted by the historian's own agency. Hayden White argues that all of them sought to ground historical insights into reality in a poetic intuition. See Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University, 1978), 53–4. It was undoubtedly Ranke's work, however, that came to have a defining influence on modern historiography till it was comprehensively challenged by postmodernism.
 16. See Rama Mantena, 'The Question of History in Precolonial India', *History and Theory*, 46/3 (2007), 396–408.
 17. See Michael Witzel, 'On Indian Historical Writing: The Role of Vamshavalis', *Journal of the Japanese Association of South Asian Studies*, 2 (1990), 1–57.
 18. See Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in their Myths?*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: Chicago University, 1988).
 19. See *Rajatarangini* 1.25–7, 240–72. For a detailed discussion see Shonaleeka Kaul, 'Of Saffron, Snow, and Spirituality: Glimpses of Cultural Geography in the *Rajatarangini*', *Negotiating Cultural Identity: Landscapes in Early Medieval South Asian History*, ed. H P Ray (Delhi: Routledge, 2015), 139–58.
 20. 'Ideas of History in Sanskrit Literature', 21–2.
 21. See *Rajatarangini*, 1.23.
 22. "In the Guise of Poetry"—Kalhana Reconsidered', 224–6.
 23. E H Carr, *What is History?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1961), 12.
 24. Leon Goldstein has best theorised this critique by pointing out that historical knowledge is necessarily inferential since 'the past as such' is an absent object of enquiry. History therefore cannot have truth correspondence with the past in ways traditionally seen as mimetic or empirical. For a lucid discussion see B Surendra Rao, *History as Historiography* (Bangalore: Indian Council of Historical Research, 2010), 9–10.
 25. See for example, *Rajatarangini* 5.392, 6.157–8, 7.283.
 26. As Paul Ricoeur showed, every great historical narrative is an allegory of time. For a cogent discussion of Ricoeur's complex theory see Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).
 27. "In the Guise of Poetry"—Kalhana Reconsidered', 207–44. Whitney Cox, 'Literary Register and Historical Consciousness in Kalhana: A Hypothesis', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 50/2 (2013), 131–60. Lawrence McCrea, 'Shanta rasa in the *Rajatarangini*: History, epic, and moral decay', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 50/2 (2013), 179–99.
 28. See Shonaleeka Kaul, *The Making of Early Kashmir: Landscape and Identity in the Rajatarangini* (Delhi: Oxford University, 2018).
 29. *Rajatarangini*, 1.4–5.

YOUNG EYES

What Should Schools Have?

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HELLO! I am a class three student, and this is school in my perspective. I know some people who actually don't like school. But I like school. Also, I like homework but sometimes in the questions the words don't make sense that even your parents can't make out. My point is that schools should teach some of the new things before they give it or the teacher should check over the work they will give.

They should always check on students between lessons, because when I am learning something new, I get very confused sometimes, and so do my classmates. So, the teacher should teach us a bit of the thing that we are doing and go through it before we start.

Also, I think that schools should teach some practical things in life like tying your shoe laces. But you might say your parents could teach you that. They could but that was just an example and parents are a whole new different level. Now, back to school! Now I am not going to say there are too many problems at school but there are one or two.

First, the school supplies. School supplies are great and please do not get me wrong or something the only problem is that they always, and I mean always, forget to put something on the list. This year it was scissors. They forgot to put scissors on the list when we actually really needed them. Now, whenever we need scissors I am stuck in a line to get one. Alright, fast forward!

Second, the types of things in school supplies. Sometimes on the school supplies list they say 'pen', and you buy a red pen when what they wanted is a blue pen or a green pen.

Editor's Comments

The above writing is a narration of the difficulties of a young girl from school. The first difficulty pertains to serious lacunae in teaching. In schools today, assessment takes precedence over teaching. Schools flaunt their students' scores in preference to the accomplishments of their teachers. Suddenly, the students or the users of an educational institution have all the responsibility to keep up the prestige of the school and the authorities almost wash off their hands from their responsibility of taking care of their pupils. Only the commercial equation gains prominence and the institution is interested only in getting more money and laurels for the school.

If a student toils hard and gets good grades, the institution does not lose any time in taking credit for that accomplishment of that student. It is common nowadays to see different institutions trying to claim the credit for the success of the same student. These institutions do not bother to ensure the quality of teaching so that the students' comprehension is assured. It is common to see question papers having questions that the teachers themselves are unable to answer. We do come across question papers having wrong questions!

The teachers should ensure that the homework questions are from topics that have been already taught very well and the teachers should ensure that each student has a good understanding of these topics. Further, teachers should give an idea of how to tackle the homework and prepare the students to properly do the homework. For instance, if a mathematics teacher is giving some problems of division as homework, that teacher should ensure that both the problem and the ways of arriving at the solution are properly shown to the students.

While a teacher introduces the students to a new concept, they should encourage the pupils to ask probable questions that could arise from that particular concept. In this way, the students would be naturally raising all the possible questions that could be asked about a particular concept. This would make it easier for the students to do their homework and also to take tests or examinations.

Teachers should also impart training to their students in basic life-skills like cleaning the room, making beds, washing dishes, praying, communicating with others, gardening, cooking, cycling, and other such abilities. Though parents are the first teachers and though the school cannot take the entire responsibility of the growth of children, it is necessary that these skills are taught at the school too so that the students can expect such an education at their homes. Moreover, with the changing scenario of parenting, it is increasingly becoming difficult for parents to impart these skills in a patient and systematic manner and they need the support of the educational institutions.

In many institutions, the spirit of questioning is strangled by rebuffing the students. Wrong answers are given by the teachers, and if the student counters this, they are asked who the teacher is, they or the teacher! This attitude

ensures that the students seldom ask questions in the future. The less said about homework or projects, the better. Most of the schools know that the homework is done by the parents of the students and yet they turn a blind eye to this fact. It is a large business to make school projects and students bring professionally made projects about the making of which they are clueless. Teachers and schools collude with businesspeople to perpetrate such scams.

Schools always create problems with providing and also asking for supplies. Generally, schools direct the students to a particular supplier for their uniform, books, stationery, and other requirements. This way, the school gains much money through commissions. The students are forced to buy expensive items even when their parents might not be able to afford them. Also, the schools do not specify the exact kind of supplies they need and the students are sent back and forth till the exact supplies are procured. The schools can clearly inform the students about the exact nature of supplies needed. Also, many a time the supplies asked for by the school are not really necessary and just extra. This also creates a burden on the parents.

PB



BALABODHA

Ancient Wisdom Made Easy

Sanskriti


THE WORD *sanskriti* is a commonly used Sanskrit word. It is used by people, who do not even know Sanskrit, as it is present in almost every Indian language. The widely used meaning of the word *sanskriti* is culture. However, it is necessary to see the other meanings and the origins of this Sanskrit word. Sanskrit is a classical language like Greek, Latin, and Persian. And in Sanskrit, as in most classical languages, most words are derived from a stem or root.

The word *sanskriti* is derived from the word *sanskrita*. The word *sanskrita* is derived by adding the prefix *sam* and suffix *ktah* to the root word *kri*, which means to do, make, perform, accomplish, cause, effect, prepare, undertake, do anything for the advantage or injury of another, execute, carry out, manufacture, work at, elaborate, build, form or construct one thing out of another, employ, use, make use of, compose, describe, cultivate, accomplish any period, bring to completion, spend, place, put, lay, bring, lead, take hold of, take to one's own side or party, or cause to share.

The word *sanskrita* means that which is endowed with a characteristic, the language of the Gods or Sanskrit, artificially produced, cooked, beautiful, auspicious, decorated, cleansed, liquid, earth, made, wrought, excellent, best, ornamented, dressed, clean, purified, finished, perfect, completed, consecrated, initiated, a regularly formed word, a regular derivative, a learned person, a brahmana, a kshatriya, a shudra, language formed by perfect grammatical rules, offering, oblation, made perfect, refined, cultivated, polished, carefully or accurately formed, elaborated, made

ready, prepared, hallowed, initiated into worldly life, married, adorned, refined or highly polished speech, a sacred usage, and sanctified. The state of *sanskrita* is called *sanskriti*.

Thus, the Sanskrit word for culture means purified, finished, refined, and perfect. The word signifies a tradition of pride in one's heritage and having self-respect. Swami Vivekananda insisted that all Indians should study Sanskrit because it gives *sanskriti*, culture. He believed that Sanskrit was not merely another language but the mirror and history of the ancient and modern traditions of India. The culture of India is preserved in all its entirety in religious texts in Sanskrit, the letter and spirit of which cannot be understood and brought to every Indian without a good working knowledge of Sanskrit. That is why, Swamiji wanted that all Indians should be Sanskrit scholars. Only then can the cultural heritage and knowledge hidden in these texts be translated into all Indian vernaculars.

The various layers of intrigue that the Sanskrit language is, carries the great lineage of Indian culture, and gives prestige, power, and strength to Indian culture says Swamiji. According to him, knowledge, culture, and prestige can coexist only through Sanskrit. The strength of a race is its culture, not mere knowledge. And, culture has to be preserved and transmitted through the medium of a language. Without culture and the language in which the culture is preserved, there is no character of a race. Culture is always something deep and profound. That is why the Sanskrit word for culture means refinement. 

TRADITIONAL TALES

Sri Rama and Sri Krishna

(Continued from the previous issue)

WE HUMAN BEINGS have been born for a great purpose and are capable of doing great things. However, we forget this great purpose and destroy ourselves because of our egos. Our humungous egos become obstacles to numerous good works. We are unwilling to give up our egos even though we know that the ego hinders many good undertakings. Also, we cause suffering to others. We humans, who have been born to achieve great things, shamelessly give importance to petty things. We should be ashamed of it. This train of thoughts points us to Arjuna's condition.

Poor Arjuna! What could he do? All his talk of bravery vanished into thin air. He started preparations for entering into fire as he had promised. Hanuman prevented him from entering into fire. In spite of that, Arjuna proceeded to arrange his pyre and light the fire. In the end, Arjuna remembered his bosom-friend and guru Sri Krishna, and heartfully prayed: 'O Krishna! Have you given up on me? In the end, you have brought me to such a position!' The time for Arjuna's entering fire was nearing. Moved by Arjuna's prayer, Sri Krishna appeared there in the guise of a brahmachari and asked Arjuna: 'Oh! Are you not the legendary Arjuna? What are you doing here?' Almost in tears, Arjuna recounted to the brahmachari all that had happened. Sri Krishna, in the guise of the brahmachari, heard all that Arjuna said and remarked: 'Dear Arjuna! Alas! In the end, you have come to such a plight!'

Then the brahmachari told to Hanuman and Arjuna: 'There is no justice in the bet you

both had. A bet should always have a judge. That is the proper thing to do. It is only fit that the judge declares the result of the bet. It is not right for you to decide the outcome of the bet by yourselves; that cannot be considered a bet. Now, both of you have the bet again, just like earlier. I will be the judge and declare the result.' Both Arjuna and Hanuman agreed to the brahmachari's idea.

Arjuna Shooting an Arrow




First Arjuna earnestly prayed to Sri Krishna for his grace. Then, he built a bridge by showering arrows. The brahmachari, who was Lord Vishnu himself, kept his discus at the very middle of the bridge. Hanuman, filled with pride on having destroyed the bridge earlier, pressed his big toe on the bridge. The bridge remained steady as it was before! Surprised, Hanuman climbed onto the bridge and jumped hither and thither, kicked the bridge, and pushed it with his hands. He took a large form and jumped with all his force on the bridge over and again. However, the bridge did not move an inch and stood steady.

Hanuman came to the shore with his mind resigned to defeat. At that very moment, the brahmachari vanished, and in his place Sri Krishna appeared as Sri Ramachandra. Hanuman remembered what Sri Ramachandra had once told him in the Treta Age: 'I will come before you as Sri Krishna in the Dvapara Age.' As soon as Hanuman thought so, Sri Ramachandra disappeared and in his place Sri Krishna was standing.

Sri Krishna embraced Hanuman, who was bowing down to him, and said: 'Hanuman! I am Sri Ramachandra. I am Sri

Krishna too. I enacted this divine play to unite both of you, who worship me by the different names of Sri Ramachandra and Sri Krishna. Arjuna! First, you built the bridge by insulting Sri Ramachandra and forgetting me. However, Hanuman destroyed that bridge by praying to me. The second time, you built the bridge thinking of me. That is why you won this time. Hanuman! You remembered me the first time and won the bet. The second time you forgot me and felt proud of your victory the first time, and tried to destroy the bridge. That state of your mind was the reason of your failure.' Saying these words, Sri Krishna disappeared. This incident occurs in the *Ananda Ramayana* and is described to have happened at the end of the Dvapara Age.

In the Mahabharata war, Hanuman was seated on Arjuna's flag. That is why one of the several names of Arjuna is *kapi-dhvaja*, one who has Hanuman on his flag.

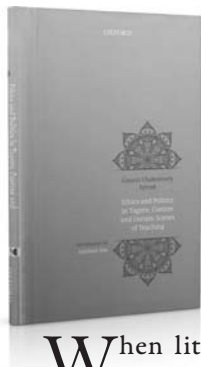
One should not be proud. One should surrender to God. There is one God, though known by different names. This story shows us that even if a true devotee gets proud rarely, the Lord graces the devotee by removing the pride. 



Arjuna and Hanuman

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



***Ethics and Politics in
Tagore, Coetzee and
Certain Scenes of Teaching***
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Oxford University Press, Ground
Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi
110002. Website: <https://global.oup.com>. 2019. 88 pp. ₹250. HB. ISBN
9780199486694.

When literature students have forgotten what Derek Attridge called ‘the singularity of literature’, we have Swami Pavitrnananda’s initiated disciple, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s 2003 lecture titled *Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee and Certain Scenes of Teaching* delivered at the Centre for Studies in the Social Sciences, Calcutta (CSSSC) reprinted by Oxford University Press in 2019. This is a necessary intervention at a time when those who publicly profess literature have effected the erasure of literature as a knowledge-domain distinct from the social sciences. Spivak emphasises in this lecture, the singular nature of literature: ‘I believe ... Aristotle said *poiesis* or making-in-fiction was *philosophoteron*—a better instrument of knowledge—than *historia*—because it allowed us to produce the probable rather than account for that which has been possible’ (21).

Spivak believes in ‘fiction as [not only an] event but also [in] fiction as task’ and then warns discerning readers of Tagore and Coetzee from harbouring covert ‘postcolonial political ambitions’ (6), thus ruining their reception of either Tagore or Coetzee. Spivak’s groundedness in literature then (2003), and now (2019-) is what all literary scholars need to integrate into their readings of ‘the singular and the unverifiable’ (20). Spivak sees literature correctly as both ‘singular’ and ‘unverifiable’. This is the beauty of the literary object. It is

opaque to philosophical and other non-literary reductionist pressures.

Spivak cannot understand why others call her a philosopher or literary theorist since she says: ‘I [due to “disciplinary formation”] cannot philosophise, I cannot write like a historian and I have no anthropological curiosity. Others call me interdisciplinary and I always wonder why’ since there are ‘generic differences’ between philosophy and literature (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Readings*, ed. Lara Choksey (Kolkata: Seagull, 2014), 162). It is precisely her ‘training in literary reading’ that had prepared her to heed ‘the language of the other’ (*Readings*, 6) and to see the literary texts as ‘coming from Latin *texere*—“to weave”’ (6).

There can be no doubt that Spivak is a votary of the text; of the written word which weaves meaning into this chaotic world. This preoccupation of Spivak’s with words and their inherent meaning and her understanding of texts as weaving-machines have ramifications, which have hitherto gone unnoticed.

Partha Chatterjee and Rosinka Chaudhuri, who have written the ‘General Introduction to the Series’, are not Spivak; both not being of her calibre. Their writings are not germane to this review since their main mode of *écriture*, as Spivak would have us say, is bereft of aporias. That is, they are merely journalistic and eschew what Anirban Das, a medical doctor, a telling profession if one were to focus on professions as Michel Foucault would want us to do, in his ‘Introduction’ (xxi-xxxiii) to the book under review speaks of ‘an ethical move’, which ‘unlike the epistemic drive [used] to calculate and contain the other’, while to be found in Spivak’s ‘relationship to the incalculable’ (xxv) cannot simply be found in anyone else including, in the series’ editors’ works and their ‘General Introduction’.

Let us note that Spivak according to Das,

tries to 'contain the other' and has a relationship with 'the incalculable'. Previously, this reviewer has pointed out that Spivak is grounded in the unverifiable *texere*, which leads her, like it led many before her, to engage with the (hospitable) other. Spivak's appreciation for the Torah commentator, Emmanuel Levinas is well known and needs no further comment here.

Returning to the book under review, Das's 'Introduction' reminds this reviewer of Somerset Maugham's remarks about Sigmund Freud's bad writing style in Maugham's short story *The Kite* (1946). Similarly, Das's 'Introduction' is illustrative of bad writing style. Das mouths a lot of senseless platitudes: 'The concept-metaphors ... the power axis ... [playing] in the spaces of marriage and family ... the subaltern cannot yet speak to the political ... this erstwhile subject ... the institutional calculus ... an epistemically obvious agency' (xxix).

From medical doctors Freud to Jacques Lacan to Das, we have verbal outpourings that scarcely make any sense to the uninitiated in their scientific field. But note that this verbose medical practitioner has omitted to even once point out the nosology of Spivak as an Indian subject by herself in *Prabuddha Bharata* and of her formation as a devotee of the Shakta Sri Ramakrishna (See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Many Voices', *Prabuddha Bharata*, 119/12 (December 2014), 655–63). Spivak, as the Kyoto Prize laureate of 2012, declared her absolute loyalty to the Ramakrishna Order headquartered at Belur Math, West Bengal, India. Because of Spivak's grounding in Shakta tantra we have Das unknowingly, but correctly, identifying in Spivak's writings an ethical preoccupation with 'the incalculable'. Das again unbeknownst to himself, rightly maps Spivak's engagement with various axes of power or Shakti in this book under review.

Now, Spivak's seeing the text as weaving, *texere*, makes sense. Another meaning of 'tantra' is like *texere*; it is weaving the cosmos into an expansive Logos comparable to the *spandana* or *sphota* theory of Indian philosophy. It is good to bear in mind that neither Derrida nor Spivak deconstructed the Logos since the Logos

is. They only tried to create a hermeneutics of deconstruction as a technique of ethicality. Martin Heidegger in his corpus has shown the immutability of the Logos within Continental philosophy.

Spivak, as it were, is a votary of power. She writes in the book under review and elsewhere of the differences between *avidya* and *vidya*; power that is destructive being informed by ignorance and power that springs from an ethical engagement with right knowledge. Spivak, unlike numerous commentators on her, never gives into atheism or nihilism since she is a disciple in the tradition of Sri Ramakrishna. She overcomes 'the structuralist hermeneutics of suspicion' (3) in spite of being schooled in Immanuel Kant's Enlightenment diatribe which fashioned Spivak through her doctoral supervisor Paul de Man and then, her friend, Jacques Derrida. It is necessary to mention in the passing that Derrida too, like Spivak, was no atheist or nihilist. But Derrida, like Levinas mentioned earlier, is not the subject of this review.

Adapting the possible anecdotal dictum of Sri Abhinavagupta (950–1016 CE), Spivak leads a public life as 'a Europeanist' (See Steve Paulson and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Critical Intimacy: An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak', *Los Angeles Review of Books* (LARB), 29 July 2016 <lareviewofbooks.org/article/critical-intimacy-interview-gayatri-chakravorty-spivak/#!> accessed 29 April 2019), a private life as a Totapuri-lineage philosopher, and in private she has no problems in exquisitely constructing the life of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and she writes: 'I ... write this for the record. ... I give witness to the great goddesses, Durga and Kali. You will work out my negotiations. "I" is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being. Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping. If not, you will of course throw the whole of it into the wastepaper basket and forget all about it'" (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Moving Devi', *Cultural Critique*, 47 (Winter 2001), 120–63; 129).

Chatterjee, Chaudhuri, and Das have all failed

to understand the Shakta roots of Spivak, who like a true Kaula, guards this alterity within her at all times. She is herself, as Gavin Flood would write of tantra in his corpus, various texts inscribed. This silent interiorisation of the incalculable is what makes Spivak a true witness to the subaltern status of Shakta tantra in the here and the now, in 2019. Spivak understands that: 'The only way a reading establishes itself—without guarantees—is by sharing the steps of the reading. That is the experience of the impossible, ethical discontinuity shaken up in a simulacrum. Unless you take a step with me, there will be no interdisciplinarity, only the tedium of turf battles' (22).

To read Spivak is to heed her call, to share her steps in reading texts qua life alongside her and that is to take a step into an 'ethical discontinuity' otherwise called Shakta tantra embodied in the siddha, the epochal avatara Sri Ramakrishna and his holy tradition that till date is simultaneously Vedantic and tantric. Spivak, if scrutinised as she deserves to be, in all her writings including the book under review, is not a Kashmiri Shaivite, nor is she a practitioner of Sri Vidya. She is a Shakta, plain and simple. For instance, in her 1987 essay, 'A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman's Text from the Third World', Spivak insists on knowing Sanskrit. Sanskrit is a language which she is aware is indispensable if we are to recover the true meaning of being a woman then and, by implication, now. Sanskrit, according to Spivak, 'consolidates' her entire corpus. Sanskrit, as it were, is the bija (seed) of Spivak's mentors and herself. When she writes, 'I will suggest that the discontinuities between the ethical and the epistemological and political fields can be staged by means of the play of logic and rhetoric in fiction' (5), she explicitly enters into the Shakta Sanskrit domains in which she, her father, and her great-grandfather were schooled in a plan inscrutable to any human gaze. More on this inscrutability from Spivak herself later.

The Sanskrit alphabet inheres Shakta tantra. This form of tantra insists on the divine feminine. Thus we have Spivak emerging as a feminist qua a *spandana* of that Shakti which she received

while being spiritually initiated by her guru, Swami Pavitrananda.

Spivak may hate it that her Enlightenment credentials are being questioned as an endgame. Yet the truth remains that she bears witness to the ancient tradition of *svadhyaya* or *lectio divina* and has become a living body where she has taken great autochthonous pains to inscribe texts only to reject them for the 'interruptive emergence of the ethical' (38) that 'is neither a beginning nor an end, only an irreducible grounding condition' (39). If this is not living within the Shakta tantra tradition, then what is? This book, a reprint by the Oxford University Press, nowhere mentions this theological orientation of Spivak, whose love for Mother Kali is well known and is no secret (See her translation, Ramaprasada Sen and Nirode Mazumdar, *Song for Kali: A Cycle of Images and Songs*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Calcutta: Seagull, 2000) for a more nuanced journeying with Spivak).

We must bear in mind that Spivak advocates authorial death and her writings are for us to deconstruct. In a moment we shall be firmly convinced from her interviews about her being a Kaula.

We have to contextualise her within what she is most reluctant to speak of her aporias: 'As I think I [Spivak] write this for the first time in my life of 70 years, I realise that I have no interest at all in bringing this into the ambit of understanding or analysis. This dwelling in an unbroken intuition of the transcendental was part of something into which we were inserted as infants. ... This is the closest formulation I can make of a wordless precomprehension that I have never attempted to describe' (Spivak's 2012 lecture, 'Sri Ramakrishna: A Sacred Life'. See 'Damning Evidence of Books', *The Telegraph* <<https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/west-bengal/damning-evidence-of-books/cid/1282390>> accessed 29 April 2019).

This 'precomprehension', uttered as a classical psychoanalytic slip, is the text under review. None has bothered to make explicit this 'precomprehension', the *mysterium tremendum* of Rudolf Otto to be found everywhere in Spivak.

This needs to be analysed if one is to begin understanding her.

Subhasis Chattopadhyay

Psychoanalyst

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**The Advaita Vedanta of
Siva Samhita**
K Kathirasan

Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U A Bungalow
Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110007.
Website: www.mlb.com. 2018. 211 pp.
₹350. HB. ISBN 9788120841727.

Shiva Samhita, written in the form of a dialogue between Shiva and Parvati, is one of the foundational texts of hatha yoga, the other two being *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and *Gheranda Samhita*. But what would be a revelation to many is that this text also presents the teachings of Advaita Vedanta in a systematic manner in its first chapter, the other four chapters dedicated to the comprehensive presentation of hatha yoga asanas, mudras, chakras, meditations, and energies in the human body.

The book under review is the commentary on the first chapter of the *Shiva Samhita* according to Advaita Vedanta traditions by K Kathirasan, a management expert and a teacher of shastras based in Singapore. The contents of his class teachings were transcribed and ably edited by his students S Anuradha and K Kannan. The author studied the scriptures in traditional manner under Swami Satprakashananda Saraswathi of Atma Vidya Vanam which is reflected in his commentary on the text.

The first chapter of the *Shiva Samhita* containing ninety-six verses presents in a simple and direct language the conclusions of Advaita Vedanta without unnecessary polemics. It deals with the qualifications of a seeker, obstacles, false doctrines, true nature of the Self, fruits of Self-knowledge, discussions on maya, creation, samadhi, and the like.

The author explains each verse in a lucid language closely following the traditional Advaitic interpretation. On the way, he clears

several misunderstandings on the nature of moksha, samadhi, liberated souls, and the true nature of *ananda* or bliss. He takes care to explain several concepts like *adhyaropa-apavada*, *drishti-shrishti vada*, and *shrishti-drishti vada* that would later help the reader to tackle serious Advaitic texts. Each verse is given in the Devanagari original, followed by the English transliteration, meaning, and detailed explanation.

Certain aspects of the text are both intriguing and illuminating. For instance, ignorance is held to be imaginary. This is a surprisingly different interpretation of the primal ignorance that causes the ultimate reality to be mistaken as this universe. By discounting ignorance itself to be imaginary, the text accords greater emphasis on the reality of the ultimate truth.

As a corollary to the standpoint that ignorance, and by its consequence the universe, is imaginary, time is also held to be imaginary. Thus, two main causes of suffering, our dabbings with the past, present, and future in the realm of ignorance, and ignorance itself, are completely discounted as not just unreal but imaginary.

This text is by its very nature introductory and defines various important Vedantic concepts in a lucid and accessible language. The translation and commentary refer to various Vedantic texts in the original, thereby introducing the reader to related literature. The text leans towards a stricter standpoint of Advaita Vedanta much like that of Gaudapada as reflected in his *Mandukya Karika*. That is why the text negates everything other than the Atman, by implication even moksha, to be false and unreal. This is arguably the most uncompromising strain of Advaita Vedanta.

This book is well produced with a beautiful cover, index, glossary, and bibliography. The author and the publisher must be commended for digging out this gem of a text from the forest of Sanskrit literature and placing it before the general public. The book is recommended for the beginners in Advaita Vedanta, who wish to know the essence of Advaita philosophy in all its subtlety and depth.

Swami Vedapurushananda
Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math

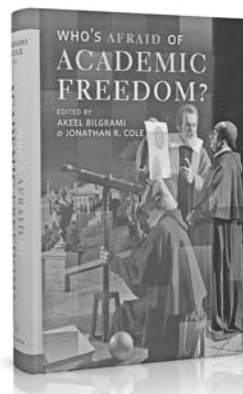
MANANA

**Exploring thought-currents from around the world.
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Who's Afraid of Academic Freedom?

Eds. Akeel Bilgrami and Jonathan R Cole

Columbia University Press, 61 West 62 Street, New York, NY 10023. 2015. xx + 428 pp. \$38. HB. ISBN 9780231168809.



THE TITLE OF this volume, despite its associative distractions, is meant quite literally. A primary achievement of the essays in the pages that follow is to identify and analyze different groups and tendencies in our society that fear academic freedom and attempt to thwart it, sources as diverse in range and generality as intellectual orthodoxy, intellectual obscurantism, the interests of donors, institutional review board licensing, Israeli and other pressure groups, U.S. legislation and government policy, and actions taken within universities such as speech codes and restrictions on research.

As a value within the academy, it is arguable that freedom of inquiry is unique and may be given a lexicographical priority over other values because it is an *enabling* value. It enables the pursuit of *other* values and, therefore, it cannot be weighed on the same scale as the values it enables, whether these be 'truth' in the outcome of inquiry, or more generally 'excellence' in the pursuit of inquiry, or simply the peace of mind of inquirers. We have said it is 'arguable' that this is so. It cannot complacently be assumed to be so. Some of the essays in the volume try to provide the arguments by which it may be established, addressing considerations that appeal to the very values that it claims to enable.

Such lexicographical priority is, of course, often granted to freedom of speech and discussion *outside* the academy as well, so much so that it is enshrined as a familiar and fundamental law

of the land. There are essays here that wrestle with the question: Is academic freedom just a name for the practice, within universities, of the political freedom guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, or is it, for reasons having to do with the specific nature of the academy, set apart from that more general freedom?

That question needs to be considered in conceptual and analytic terms, but also historically. One of the curious features of the value of academic freedom is how little it has evolved since the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) first articulated the value in its formal statement in 1915, which was reinforced and somewhat expanded in 1940. The value has not evolved over time, the way the interpretation and scope of the First Amendment has. While there have been essays and books written about academic freedom since 1940, it may well be time for a more detailed and considered articulation of what exactly academic freedom protects and what it does not—and whether we should reconsider its original intent, which was (as Robert Post has claimed in a number of essays) that academic freedom is distinguishable from First Amendment rights and has more to do with the 'contract' that exists between faculty members and others, including trustees, academic administrators, and outside authorities. Some essays here make an attempt to give some historical grounding to this issue, while others dispute it by showing its extreme restrictiveness.

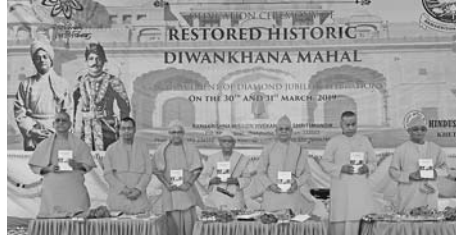
Though questions of academic freedom affect all of society and not just the society of scholars, though its fruits are reaped by everyone and by most institutions, a specific group that is most affected by its presence or absence is the faculty in universities with their special duties of teaching and research. With this in mind, the editors decided to carry out an empirical pilot survey of Columbia University full-time faculty opinion on a wide variety of questions revolving around the academic freedom they enjoy and expect but which is sometimes under question and threat. The survey is presented here with an analysis by Jonathan R Cole and his collaborators. One question that is derived from the results of the survey relates to the hierarchy of values in a university: Is academic freedom seen by the faculty as a special enabling value, or is it considered by most contemporary faculty members as one among a set of contenders for priority? The fourteen vignettes contained in the empirical study, which in some cases asked faculty members to choose among competing university values (one of which was always free inquiry or academic freedom, although that was never explicitly mentioned in the survey), suggest that most faculty view academic freedom as essentially freedom of speech. The survey also suggests an erosion of certain core values within the academy. Is academic freedom one of them, as apparently are values like disinterestedness (exemplified in, among other things, the normative prohibition against faculty members profiting from their discoveries)? The pilot study raises more questions than it answers, one of which is whether different major universities and colleges place different weights on these various values. It is fair to say that ever since John Coulter in a celebrated address stressed the value of *Lehrfreiheit* to the idea of the modern research university, followed several decades later by the equally and rightly celebrated Kalven committee

report, the University of Chicago has been something of a pioneer in this country on the matter of the centrality that academic freedom came to have in higher education. A comparison of other universities with the University of Chicago on the question of freedom of inquiry may therefore be one way to assess these differential weights. Two essays here that focus on the University of Chicago may provide a start in helping to make such a comparative study possible.

Taken together, these essays powerfully convey how no freedom can be taken for granted even in the most well oiled of functioning formal democracies. It is in the nature of power to resist the possession and exercise of freedom by those over whom it exercises power. And power, as we also know, does not threaten freedom always by coercion or, to put it differently, the opposite of freedom is not necessarily always coercive agents and policies and institutions but the presence of much less easily identifiable tendencies. The modern university is not a medieval cloister and is as subject to the political and economic interests that generate these tendencies and threaten freedom as most, if not all, other institutions. (One extraordinary, up-to-the-minute example of this is the very recent amendment to a budget bill by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK), which was passed by a voice vote and signed into law by President Obama. The amendment, or rider, to the bill ordered the National Science Foundation to refrain from funding any political science research 'except for research projects that the [NSF director] certifies as promoting national security or the economic interests of the United States.' Not since former president Ronald Reagan's effort to eliminate all social science funding by the NSF has there been such a blatant attack by Congress on free inquiry and research judged as superior by the members of NSF panels of experts.)



REPORTS



Inauguration of the Renovated Fatteh Billass Palace at Khetri

New Math Centre

The ancestral house of Swami Trigunatitanandaji Maharaj in Kolkata was recently acquired by the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. After the restoration work, the house has been named **Ramakrishna Math Swami Trigunatitananda Memorial**, and it was inaugurated by Swami Vagishanandaji on 17 April 2019. Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute (RKMVERI) will be conducting classes and other activities at the memorial. The address of the memorial is 'Ramakrishna Math Swami Trigunatitananda Memorial, 164, Acharya Prafulla Chandra Road, Kolkata 700004', phone: 79083 16611, and email: <trigunatita.memorial@gmail.com>.

Ramakrishna Math (Kathamrita Bhavan), Kolkata, till recently a sub-centre of Ramakrishna Math (Shyampukur Bati), has been made a full-fledged branch of Ramakrishna Math, Belur. Its address is 'Ramakrishna Math (Kathamrita Bhavan), 14 Guruprasad Chowdhury Lane, Kolkata 700006', phone: 89025 53411 and 79803 91808, and email: <kathamrita.bhavan@rkmm.org>.

Commemoration of the 125th Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's Addresses at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, USA

The following centres held programmes mentioned against their names: **In India: Baranagar Math:** Four lecture programmes at the centre and also in a nearby school between 15 and 29 March, which were attended by 264 students and 30 teachers. **Coimbatore Mission Vidyalaya:** Cultural competitions at three colleges in Uduimalpet and Coimbatore on 26 and 27 February,

and 6 March. In all, 507 students took part in the competitions. At all the venues, the competitions were followed by a talk, an awards ceremony, and a skit. **Hatamuniguda:** A written quiz competition at a school in Koraput district on 9 February in which 140 students took part. The centre also held two youths' conventions on 26 and 27 February, which were attended by a total of about 350 youths, and a lecture programme at a nearby girls' high school on 26 February attended by 400 students and teachers. **Hyderabad:** Four youths' conventions in Suryapet, Kothagudem, Mahabubnagar, and Nirmal districts of Telangana on 26 February and 1, 11, and 24 March, which were attended by about 3,000 youths in all. **Malda:** A youths' convention on 10 March in which 470 delegates from 8 colleges in and around Malda participated. **Mangaluru:** Lecture programmes in 14 colleges in March, which were attended by about 2,750 students in all. **Mysuru:** Five workshops between 1 and 15 March in which a total of 1,044 students from 9 colleges took part. **Naora:** A lecture programme on 30 March, which was attended by about 1,200 persons. **Pune:** Conventions at five colleges in Nashik and Amravati districts for tribal youths in February and March. In all, 1,077 youths took part in the conventions. **Srinagar:** Cultural competitions at a girls' orphanage in Baramulla district on 24 March in which 60 students participated. The competitions were followed by a talk and a prize distribution ceremony. **Vadodara:** An essay-writing competition from November to January in which 1,159 students from 213 schools of 14 districts in Gujarat took part. Prizes were awarded to the winners in the month of March. **Vijayawada:** A special event consisting of an inspirational talk and a question-answer session on 20 March, which was attended

by 670 students and 60 teachers. **Antpur:** A public meeting on 15 April attended by 350 devotees. **Gadadhar Ashrama, Kolkata:** A lecture programme at a school in Hooghly district on 10 April, which was attended by about 200 students and teachers. **Kankurgachhi:** A spiritual retreat on 28 April, which was attended by 446 devotees. **Mangaluru:** Lecture programmes in 10 colleges in April, which were attended by 2,150 youths in all. **Nagpur:** A special lecture on 13 March attended by a good number of devotees. **Outside India: Colombo, Sri Lanka:** A lecture programme at the centre on 10 March and two special lectures at Batticaloa sub-centre on 11 and 23 March, which were attended by about 6,500 people in all. **My-mensingh, Bangladesh:** A public meeting on 1 March attended by about 100 people.

News of Branch Centres

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Society, Jamshedpur conducted a blood donation camp on 12 January in which 213 people donated blood.

Ramakrishna Mission, Kamarpukur held a training programme on organic farming on 24 and 25 January in which 61 farmers took part.

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow inaugurated the year-long golden jubilee celebration of its Vivekananda Polyclinic and Institute of Medical Sciences on 18 February.

Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot brought out on 24 February a commemorative volume to mark the 125th anniversary of Swamiji's visit to Gujarat.

Ramakrishna Math, Chennai distributed buttermilk and *sharbat* to about 20,000 people on 17 and 18 March on the occasion of the annual Ratha Yatra and other celebrations of Sri Kapaleeshwarar Temple, Chennai. The Math also took up cleaning of the streets around the temple after the celebration on 18 March.

Srimat Swami Vagishanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna

Mission, inaugurated the extension to the prayer hall at **Ramakrishna Math (Gadadhar Ashrama), Kolkata**, on 24 March, the sacred birthday of Swami Yoganandaji Maharaj.

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) awarded the highest grade of A++ to **RKMVERI** (deemed university), **Belur**, for five years in the first cycle of its assessment. The Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 3.66, out of 4, secured by RKMVERI is the second highest CGPA obtained so far by the universities accredited as per the Revised Accreditation Framework of NAAC.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kailashahar held a blood donation camp on 3 March in which 51 people donated blood.

Ramakrishna Math, Pala conducted medical camps at two places in Kottayam district on 23 December and 20 January in which specialist doctors in a number of disciplines treated 298 patients. Free medicines were given to patients.

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Porbandar held a cancer detection and awareness camp on 17 February in which 69 patients were examined.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Salem conducted a medical camp on 24 March in which 733 patients were treated.

The refurbished cardiology ward at **Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata**, was inaugurated on 3 March. The centre also conducted a day-long medical camp at Belur Math on 17 March, the day of the annual Public Celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary. A team of eight doctors, five nurses, and some paramedical staff treated 343 patients in the camp.

The renovated Fatteh Billass palace at **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Smriti Mandir, Khetri**, where Swami Vivekananda had stayed as a guest of Raja Ajit Singh in 1891 and 1893, was inaugurated by Swami Suvirananda, General

Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 31 March. The palace now houses the Ajit-Vivek Museum, which was also dedicated by him on the same day. Public meetings and cultural events were held on 30 and 31 March as part of the inaugurations and also to mark the diamond jubilee of Khetri centre. About 50 monks and 400 devotees and well-wishers attended the two-day programme.

Sri Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, visited **Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi** on 18 April.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, visited **Ramakrishna Math, Baranagar** on 28 April and laid the foundation stone for the proposed dispensary-and-non-formal-school building at the centre's nearby campus on Ratan Babu Road. Srimat Swami Vagishanandaji Maharaj, Swami Suvirananda, and about 300 monks and 3,000 devotees attended the programme.

The following centres held summer camps for students. The programmes included chanting, bhajans, yogasanas, values education classes, and so on: 1. **Bengaluru**: 14 to 28 April; 110 students participated. 2. **Kochi**: 22 to 28 April; 51 students participated. 3. **Ponnampet**: 21 to 28 April; 120 students participated.

An associate professor in the physics department of **RKMVERI** (deemed university), **Belur**, has been appointed a Regular Associate of the prestigious International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP), Italy, for a period of six years. This will entitle him to a few fully sponsored academic visits to ICTP.

Four of our degree colleges have secured good positions in the ranking list for the year 2019 announced by the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, on 8 April. The colleges and their rankings are as follows:

- 1) **Vivekananda Centenary College (Rahara)**: National Rank: 8, WB State Rank: 1; 2) **Vidyamandira (Saradapitha)**: National Rank: 11, WB State Rank: 3; 3) **Residential College (Narendrapur)**: National Rank: 15, WB State Rank: 4; 4) **Arts and Science College (Coimbatore Mission)**: National Rank: 59, TN State Rank: 18.

Five students of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar** won the prestigious Kishore Vaigyanik Protsahan Yojana (KVPY) Fellowship 2018.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Aurangabad held a medical camp from 26 to 28 March at Paithan, the birthplace of the Sant Eknath in Aurangabad district, on the occasion of Nath Shashthi Mela. In all, 4,047 patients were treated in the medical camp.

Ramakrishna Mission, Vadodara conducted a free BMD (bone mineral density) test camp on 28 April in which 162 persons underwent the test.

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindaban held a urology-cum-general-surgery camp from 28 to 31 March in which 10 specialist doctors checked 320 patients and performed 63 surgeries.

Dr Hasan Mahmud, Minister of Information, Government of Bangladesh, took part in Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebration at **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka**, Bangladesh, on 8 March.

Dhaka (Bangladesh) centre conducted a medical camp at Langalbandh in Narayanganj district on 12 April on the occasion of Ashtami Snana, an annual bathing festival, at Brahmaputra River; 76 patients were treated and given free medicines in the camp.

Values Education and Youth Programmes

Baranagar Mission Ashrama conducted values education programmes at four colleges in Kolkata on 27 and 29 March. In all, 304 students and 118 staff members attended the programmes.

Delhi centre held a students' convention on 2 February in which 820 students from a number of schools took part. Further, it conducted nine values education workshops in Delhi, Ernakulam, Chandigarh, Gurugram, and Visakhapatnam between 16 February and 8 March, which were attended by a total of 676 teachers and principals and 169 students. The centre also distributed 110 LED projectors to the government schools in Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan on 26 and 27 March; The centre conducted 26 values education workshops in 12 cities spread all over the country between 3 and 26 April, which were attended by a total of 1,745 teachers and 93 principals.

Gurap Ashrama conducted a convention on 15 March attended by 320 people, mostly youths.

Medinipur centre held values education workshops at seven educational institutions in three districts of West Bengal from 6 to 27 March; they were attended by 2,814 students and teachers.

Rajkot Ashrama conducted two values education programmes on 15 and 18 March attended by 160 primary school students; The Ashrama held (i) three values education programmes on 16, 18, and 20 April, attended by about 195 students, and (ii) a programme on human excellence on 17 April, attended by 56 bank professionals.

Vadodara centre held values education programmes at 21 schools in 4 districts of Gujarat from January to March, which were attended by 5,170 students in all.

Bagda Math held 14 values education programmes in 13 schools of Purulia district from 7 February to 29 March. In all, about 2,700 students and 100 teachers attended these programmes.

Swachchha Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign)

Kamarpukur centre carried out a cleanliness drive at Kamarpukur village on 24 February, 24 March, and 28 April.

Mangaluru Ashrama conducted the following activities: in February: (i) four cleanliness drives in Mangaluru involving 1,650 volunteers, (ii) awareness campaigns for 22 days in which volunteers reached out to nearly 1,000 households in different parts of Mangaluru city (iii) nineteen seminars in colleges covering 5,240 youths, and (iv) cleanliness drives in 150 villages of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts in which 19,750 people took part. (v) five cleanliness drives in Mangaluru involving 1,850 volunteers, (vi) awareness campaigns for 24 days in which volunteers reached out to nearly 1,250 households in different parts of the city, and (vii) ten seminars in colleges covering 3,560 youths; in April: (i) four cleanliness drives in Mangaluru involving 1,550 volunteers, and (ii) awareness campaigns for 25 days in which volunteers reached out to 1,360 households.

Relief

Winter Relief: The following centres distributed blankets and winter garments, shown against their names, to needy people: **India: Aalo**: 193 blankets on 17 February and 205 blankets on 3 and 5 March. **Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata**: 200 blankets from 9 December to 4 January. **Agartala**: 500 blankets from 15 December to 14 January. **Almora**: 520 blankets and 40 sweaters from 1 November to 31 January. **Aurangabad**: 1,000 sweaters from 13 to 22 January. **Baghbazar**: 5,500 sweaters from 2 December to 27 January. **Bajepuratappur, Bardhaman**: 1,000 sweaters from 1 October to 19 December and 120 blankets and 306 mufflers on 20 and 23 March. **Balaram Mandir**: 100 blankets on 24 December. **Bankura**: 968 blankets from 26 October to 11 January. **Baranagar Math**: 150 blankets from 8 October to 16 December. **Baranagar Mission**: 200 blankets and 400 sweaters from 12 December to 16 February. **Belgharia**: 3,980 sweaters on 23 and 24 January. **Bhubaneswar**: 500 blankets from 13 December to 15 January and 500 sweaters

from 15 November to 19 February. **Chandipur:** 154 blankets from 23 December to 19 January and 50 blankets on 14 February. **Contai:** 250 blankets on 6 and 10 December. **Cooch Behar:** 300 blankets and 600 sweaters from 16 December to 3 February. **Darjeeling:** 6,741 jackets, sweaters, and sweatshirts from 28 June to 13 February and 13,500 jackets, sweaters, and sweatshirts from 18 December to 13 February. **Dibrugarh:** 500 blazers and sweaters from 8 to 24 March. **Garbeta:** 500 sweaters from 20 December to 16 January. **Gourhati:** 30 sweaters on 26 December. **Hatamuniguda:** 1,000 sweaters from 9 January to 15 February. **Ichapur:** 500 blankets and 500 sweaters from 23 January to 11 February. **Imphal:** 1,000 coats and 1,000 sweaters from 3 to 27 March. **Jammu:** 300 blankets from 1 December to 20 February. **Jamshedpur:** 500 blankets and 500 sweaters from 31 October to 11 February. **Jamtara:** 500 sweaters from 1 to 24 February. **Jayrambati:** 3,300 blankets from 19 December to 20 January and 6,000 jackets from 11 January to 7 February. **Kamarpukur:** 1,304 jackets, sweaters, and sweatshirts from 23 November to 9 December. **Kankurgachhi:** 74 blankets, 187 blazers, 78 coats, 90 jackets, 383 sweaters, and 290 sweatshirts from 21 December to 24 January. **Kanpur:** 150 blankets on 3 January. **Karimganj:** 1,500 sweaters from 23 December to 6 February. **Katihar:** 500 sweaters from 3 to 19 February. **Khetri:** 105 blankets, 50 jackets, 4,566 sweaters, and 1,545 sweatshirts from 11 January to 24 February. **Koalpara** (sub-centre of Jayrambati Ashrama): 700 blankets from 25 December to 15 January. **Kothar:** 1,747 sweaters from 15 July to 2 September 2018 and 500 sweaters on 20 and 27 January. **Lalgarh:** 500 blankets from 2 December to 16 January. **Malda:** 600 sweaters and 46 blankets from 4 December to 3 February. **Mayavati:** 7,071 sweaters from 9 December to 4 March. **Medinipur:** 1,000 blankets and 1,000 sweaters from 10 December to 26 January. **Muzaffarpur:** 300 blankets from 28 December to 3

January. **Nagpur:** 1,014 jackets from 1 March to 15 June. **Narainpur:** 20 blazers, 900 jackets, 5,544 sweaters, and 566 sweatshirts from 8 December to 29 January. **Narendrapur:** 500 blankets from 19 December to 19 January. **Narottam Nagar:** 2,001 sweaters from 18 December to 10 January. **Patna:** 505 blankets from 23 December to 5 January. **Prayagraj (Allahabad):** 500 blankets and 200 sweaters on 13 and 14 February; 1,000 blankets and 592 sweaters from 13 February to 16 March. **Pune:** 500 sweaters from 25 December to 23 February. **Puri Mission:** 500 sweaters from 24 November to 15 December. **Rahara:** 2,527 blankets from 23 December to 28 January and 1,274 blankets from 17 September to 23 October. **Saradapitha:** 500 blankets from 11 December to 8 January. **Sargachhi:** 300 blankets and 1,000 jackets and sweaters from 1 December to 3 February. **Sarisha:** 500 blankets on 25 and 29 December; 408 sweaters from 29 January to 8 February. **Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata:** 180 blankets on 17 January. **Shillong:** 500 sweaters on 24 February. **Shivanahalli:** 950 sweaters from 26 September to 4 February. **Shyamla Tal:** 500 blankets and 12,000 sweaters from 24 December to 5 March. **Sinthi, Kolkata:** 442 blankets from 25 December to 24 January. **Sohra (Cherrapunjee):** 5,235 jackets, sweaters, and sweatshirts from 3 to 29 December. **Swamiji's Ancestral House:** 300 blankets on 3 and 14 December. **Tamluk:** 1,000 blankets from 2 to 31 December. **Tiruvalla:** 199 blankets from 30 September to 17 February. **Varanasi Advaita Ashrama:** 200 sweaters from 9 January to 24 March. **Varanasi Home of Service:** 700 blankets from 20 January to 7 March. **Vrindaban:** 366 blankets from 29 December to 8 January. **Bangladesh: Chittagong:** 280 blankets from 10 January to 18 February. **Dinajpur:** 1,200 blankets from 11 December to 28 February. **Faridpur:** 195 blankets from 20 January to 10 February. **Jessore:** 100 blankets on 27 January. **Mymensingh:** 530 blankets and 70 sweaters from 11 to 25 January.

Flood Relief : Kerala: Continuing the relief services among the families affected by the severe floods that had hit Kerala in the month of August, **Tiruvalla** centre distributed 23,588 notebooks, 115 geometry boxes, and 516 T-shirts among 3,816 students in Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta districts from 20 December to 22 February.

Fire Relief : Arunachal Pradesh: In a fire incident at Puak Gumin village in West Siang district, a house was completely burned down. **Aalo** centre distributed 10 blankets, 20 shirts, 20 trousers, 14 jackets, 14 sweaters, 6 belts, and stationery to the affected family on 3 March. **West Bengal:** A fire gutted 25 shanties in Nivedita colony at Dakshineswar, Kolkata, on 16 March. **Saradapitha** distributed 50 saris, 50 tarpaulins, and 6 kg biscuits to 50 families from 18 to 20 March.

Distress Relief : The following centres distributed various items to needy people: **India: Baghbazar:** 5,500 shirts, 2,000 tops, 7,500 trousers, and 119 school bags from 8 December to 3 February. **Bajepuratappur, Bardhaman:** 3,000 shirts, 750 trousers, 57 saris, 150 children's garments, 81 assorted garments, and 5 bedsheets from 20 to 28 March. **Bamunmura:** 2,000 shirts and 1,000 tops from 16 January to 17 March. **Bhubaneswar:** 2,900 shirts and 200 trousers from 12 November to 26 February. **Darjeeling:** 21,000 shirts and T-shirts, 15,000 trousers, jeans, denims, leggings, jeggings, and 1,086 pairs of shoes from 18 December to 18 February. **Dibrugarh:** 500 shirts and T-shirts and 500 trousers from 8 to 24 March. **Garbeta:** 1,000 shirts from 20 December to 16 January. **Guwahati:** 1,440 shirts, 2,500 trousers, and 1,500 tops from 14 February to 23 March. **Ichapur:** 1,000 shirts and T-shirts and 500 trousers and denims from 23 January to 11 February. **Imphal:** 1,000 shirts, 1,000 trousers, and 2,000 tops from 3 to 27 March. **Indore:** 1,000 shirts and 1,000 trousers from 6 to 10 March. **Jalpaiguri:** 1,702 saris, 1,166 dhotis, and 834 uttariyas from 9 October to 22

January. **Jayrambati:** 6,000 shirts and 6,000 trousers from 11 January to 7 February. **Kamarpukur:** 5,770 pens, 5,770 notebooks, 1,154 pencils, 577 erasers, and 577 umbrellas on 12 March. **Kankurgachhi:** 1,564 notebooks and 391 pens on 28 February and 19 March. **Kathamrita Bhavan:** 350 shirts and 400 trousers on 17 February. **Koyilandy:** 350 shirts, 350 trousers, 350 T-shirts, and 575 saris from 10 to 27 March. **Mayavati:** 1,780 shirts and 1,876 trousers from 9 December to 4 March. **Naora:** 100 saris, 3,750 shirts, and 1,750 trousers from 4 January to 26 March. **Prayagraj (Allahabad):** 140 shirts and 280 trousers on 15 and 16 March. **Pune:** 2,000 shirts and 2,000 trousers from 25 December to 23 February. **Puri Mission:** 1,000 shirts from 20 October to 16 December. **Rahara:** 83 dhotis, 103 lungis, 12 churidars, 516 saris, 220 bedsheets, 348 chaddars, 876 mosquito-nets, 12 hearing aids, and 76 kg baby food from 17 September to 16 March. **Ramanathapuram:** 351 shirts, 1,179 T-shirts, 1,504 trousers, and 1,510 tops from 22 February to 14 March. **Sarisha:** 400 shirts and 400 trousers from 29 January to 8 February. **Shivanahalli:** 1,302 shirts and 450 trousers from 26 September to 4 February. **Shyamla Tal:** 3,000 shirts and 3,000 trousers from 24 December to 5 March. **Varanasi Advaita Ashrama:** 200 shirts and 200 trousers from 9 January to 24 March. **Bangladesh: Dinajpur:** 60 saris from 11 December to 28 February. **Zambia: Lusaka:** 40 T-shirts on 8 March.

Flood Rehabilitation : Kerala: The headquarters has undertaken construction of eight anganwadis, childcare centres, in Alappuzha district through **Kochi** centre.

Fire Rehabilitation: West Bengal: In response to a fire incident at Kamarda village in Purba Medinipur district in which a house was destroyed, **Contai** centre distributed 22 asbestos sheets, 30 bamboo poles, 12 wooden pillars, and other construction items to the family from 1 to 12 March.





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Letter to a Student Swami Purushottamananda

Swami Purushottamananda, who had inspired several hundreds of youth, had written a letter to a student who had been facing difficulties in studying his lessons and facing the examinations. Through his letter, he guided the student in the art of studying systematically and with concentration, and how to build self-confidence and face the examinations without fear! That letter is published as this booklet to benefit a large number of students.

Secret of Concentration Swami Purushottamananda

This small booklet is a companion volume to the booklet *Letter to a Student* authored by Swami Purushottamananda, who had guided several hundreds of youth in the practice of concentration. In this booklet, the author analyses the need for concentration to achieve success and gives practical tips for practising concentration. Everyone, especially the youth and students, will find the ideas in this booklet helpful.



Pages 40
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Time-sense Swami Purushottamananda

Time plays a decisive role in every student's life. The author, Swami Purushottamananda, well-known for his writings on themes useful to students, shows in this booklet how students can use and save time to their advantage. Dealing with the subject of time-management, he has also included a section on how a student can make use of the practice of prayer to his or her self-confidence and concentration.

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Swami Purushottamananda, who had inspired several hundreds of youth, had written three booklets dealing with the need and practice of concentration, how to study systematically and face examinations with confidence, and how time is to be saved and used for career building. For the sake of convenience, the contents of all the three booklets have been brought out in this single volume. The readers, especially the youth and students, will find the ideas in this volume very helpful.



Pages 120
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We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran.

Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.

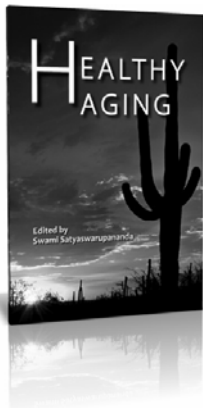


Swami Vivekananda

ABP

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by Swami Satyaswarupananda



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কাব্য, সমালোচনা প্রভৃতি

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PILGRIM'S GUIDE TO THE HOLY TRIO IN KOLKATA



Sri Ramakrishna visits Yogin-Ma's House

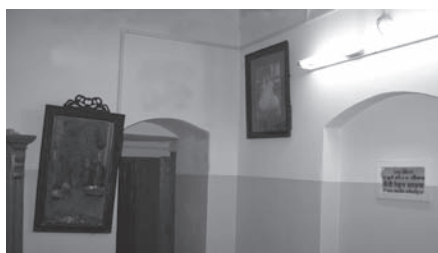
Sri Ramakrishna was seated in the drawing-room of Yogin-ma's home on the ground floor. There several young men performed a musical concert for the Master. It was eight-thirty in the evening. Locals, both young and old, came thronging to see the saint, looking at him through the windows. The younger Naren, saw the boys climbing the windows and scolded them: 'Why are you here? Get away! Go home!' The Master tenderly objected, 'Let them stay.' Every now and then he chanted: 'Hari Om! Hari Om!' The floor of the drawing-room was covered with a carpet. The young musicians sat on it songs to Krishna. The Master said, 'Ah, how sweet the music is! How melodious the violin is! How good the accompaniments are! (Pointing to a boy) He and the flutist seem to be a nice pair.' After the concert was over, Sri Ramakrishna said joyfully, 'It is very fine indeed.' Pointing to a young man, he said, 'He seems to know how to play every instrument.' He said to M., 'They are all good people.' A few minutes later the Golap-ma said to Thakur, 'Please come inside.' Thakur asked why the refreshments could not be brought to the room where he sat. Golap-

ma replied, 'Yogin-ma requests you to bless the room with the dust of your feet. Then the room will be turned into Benares, and anyone dying in it will have no trouble hereafter.' Sri Ramakrishna went inside accompanied by the brahmani and the young men of the family.

Swami Akhandanada described another interesting incident that occurred at Yogin-ma's house: 'Yogin-ma's brother Hiralal did not like the fact that his sister went to Dakshineswar. We heard that when Yogin-ma invited the Master to her house, Hiralal brought a very large-sized wrestler named Manmatha, to frighten the Master. However, after Manmatha saw the Master and heard a few words from him, he fell at his feet and said to him, weeping, "My Lord, I am guilty. Please forgive me." The Master replied, "Okay, come to Dakshineswar."' Yogin-ma had two images of baby Krishna (pictured below), which she lovingly worshipped. She recounts, 'One day while meditating there, Balarama and Krishna came as two young boys, hugged me, stroked my back and conversed.' Another time she recounts, 'Once I was in such a high spiritual state that wherever I turned my eyes, I would see my Chosen Deity. That state lasted for three days.' The house is located at 59-b, Bagbazar st, Bagbazar.



Front of Yogin-ma's



Thakur sat in this room and listened to the concert



Family Deities of Krishna

In loving memory of Dr. Rina Bhar —Dr. Gopal Chandra Bhar

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*The best guide in life is strength. In religion,
as in all other matters, discard everything
that weakens you, have nothing to do
with it.*

—Swami Vivekananda



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